



The Standpoint of World History and Imperial Japan

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THE STANDPOINT OF WORLD HISTORY AND IMPERIAL JAPAN

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THE STANDPOINT OF WORLD HISTORY AND IMPERIAL JAPAN

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This dissertation will reread the intellectual history of the Japanese empire from the perspective of *sekaishi* or “world history.” World history was an idea that was discussed by a number of scholars, intellectuals and writers intending to create a “new world order” in the Asia-Pacific region when the empire was faced with the crisis of total war since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. In this dissertation, I argue that modern Japan was a colonial empire and equipped with a universalist mode of legitimization for its system of rule and integration of its multiethnic populations. By discussing the Japanese Romantics and the Kyoto school of philosophy, I will show how they sought to integrate and mobilize the nation and the imperial subjects in the colonies through the idea of world history. First of all, I will thematize the Japanese Romantic writer Yasuda Yojūrō in order to show that Yasuda, contrary to his established image as an anti-modern, aesthetic and ethnic nationalist, in fact advocated the idea of world history. To this end, I will seek to demonstrate how his notion of world history was consistent with, and derived immanently from, his important literary notion of “romantic irony” by looking at his discussions of the German Romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel. Moreover, I will closely examine his narrative of world history and his rhetorical practice of romantic irony in his encounter with the colonial intellectual Hyun Yong Sup in his travelogues on colonial Korea. In turn, I will suggest the critical stakes in Hyun’s ironic response to the imperial universalism. Second, I will examine the wartime discussions of “philosophy of world history” by

the second generation of the Kyoto school such as Kōyama Iwao and Nishitani Keiji. By focusing on their conception of *sōryokusen* or “total war,” I will aim to reveal internal contradictions of the notion of world history, which I describe as antinomies. Through these treatments, I will intend to demonstrate how the universalist idea of world history served for Japan’s imperial formation in both the metropole and the colony and how it was entangled with ironies and antinomies.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Takeshi Kimoto was born in Tokyo, Japan on December 14, 1971 and grew up in Kokubunji, Tokyo. He attended Waseda University and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy in 1998. He continued to study at the graduate school of the same university and received a Master of Arts in Philosophy in 2001. He then attended the graduate school in the field of the area studies at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He first visited Cornell University in 2002 as an exchange student and then officially enrolled in a Ph.D. program in East Asian Literature at Cornell in 2003. He received a M.A. degree in the same field in 2006.

Dedicated to my mother, Michiko Kimoto

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Introduction:

World History, Universality, and the Aporias of Empire

In a way, the “Overcoming Modernity” symposium represented a condensed version of the aporias of modern Japanese history. Faced with the urgent task of interpreting the idea of eternal warfare at a time of total war, the symposium marked the explosion of such traditional oppositions as those of reactionism and restoration, reverence for the Emperor and exclusion of foreigners, isolationism and the opening of the country, ultranationalism and ‘civilization and enlightenment,’ and East and West.

—Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Overcoming Modernity” (1959)¹

This dissertation will reread the intellectual history of the Japanese empire from the perspective of *sekaishi* or “world history.” World history was an idea that was discussed by a number of scholars, intellectuals and writers intending to create a “new world order” in the Asia-Pacific region when the empire was faced with the crisis of total war since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. In this dissertation, I argue that modern Japan was a colonial empire and equipped with a universalist mode of legitimization for its system of rule and integration of its multiethnic populations. By discussing the Japanese Romantics and the Kyoto school of philosophy, I will show how they sought to integrate and mobilize the nation and the imperial subjects in the colonies through the idea of world history. First of all, I will thematize the Japanese Romantic writer Yasuda Yojūrō in order to show that Yasuda, contrary to his established image as an anti-modern, aesthetic and ethnic nationalist, in fact advocated the idea of world history. To this end, I will seek to demonstrate how his notion of world history was consistent with, and derived immanently from, his important literary notion of “Romantic irony” by looking at his discussions of the German Romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel. Moreover, I will closely examine his narrative of world

¹ Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Overcoming Modernity” in *What Is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, trans. and ed. Richard F. Calichman (New York Columbia University Press, 2005), 145-6.

history and his rhetorical practice of Romantic irony in his encounter with the colonial intellectual Hyun Yong Sup in his travelogues on colonial Korea. In turn, I will suggest the critical stakes in Hyun's ironic response to the imperial universalism. Second, I will examine the wartime discussions of "philosophy of world history" by the second generation of the Kyoto school such as Kōyama Iwao and Nishitani Keiji. By focusing on their conception of *sōryokusen* or "total war," I will aim to reveal internal contradictions of the notion of world history, which I describe as antinomies. Through these treatments, I will intend to demonstrate how the universalist idea of world history served for Japan's imperial formation in both the metropole and the colony and how it was entangled with ironies and antinomies.

In this introduction, I will first clarify the historical background in which the discussions of world history emerged. The outbreak of the so-called China Incident (Sino-Japanese War) marked the critical point for this discourse. As a number of scholars have pointed out, what was especially path-breaking was the idea of *Tōa kyōdōtai* or the East Asian Cooperative Community that was launched by major intellectuals, journalists, and bureaucrats, such as Miki Kiyoshi, Rōyama Masamichi and Ozaki Hotsumi, who participated in *Shōwa kenkyūkai* (the Showa Research Association), a brain trust for the then Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro.² Among them, a Kyoto philosopher Miki Kiyoshi was most influential in this discussion. He decided to commit himself to this agenda, giving a talk entitled "the World Historical

² For Miki Kiyoshi and his involvement in the Showa Research Association, see Iwasaki Minoru, "Desire for a Poietic Metasubject: Miki Kiyoshi's Technology Theory," trans. J. Victor Koschmann in *Total War and 'Modernization'*, ed. Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann and Ryūichi Narita (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Program, 1998), 159-80; Yonetani Masafumi, "Miki Kiyoshi no 'sekaishi no tetsugaku'" [Miki Kiyoshi's philosophy of world history] in *Hiyō kūkan* [Critical space] no. 19 (1998), 40-68; Nakano Toshio, "Sōryokusen taisei to chishikijin: Miki Kiyoshi to teikoku no shutai keisei" [The regime of total war and intellectuals: Miki Kiyoshi and the subject formation of empire] in *Sōryokusenka no chi to seido* [Knowledge and institutions under the total war], ed. Naoki Sakai et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2002), 173-209; J. Victor Koschmann, "Tekunorojii no shihai, shihai no tekunorojii" [Rule by technology, technologies of rule], trans. Kasai Hirotaka in *Sōryokusenka no chi to seido* [Knowledge and institutions under the total war], ed. Naoki Sakai et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2002), 139-72.

Significance of the China Incident” on July 7, 1938, the first year anniversary of the Incident.³ As the title shows, he sought to solve the conflict by providing a universal purpose for the current engagement, that is, construction of a true regional community. He begins his talk by discussing the consequences of the World War I, which, first and foremost, brought about the end of the Eurocentrism that has dominated the modern world. It means nothing less than that the world is now divided with three major ideologies competing with each other: liberalism, communism and fascism. These ideas, however, cannot be a real world principle: the current crisis has already proved the bankruptcy of liberalism as a modern principle; fascism as a nationalist principle cannot represent the world, which is increasingly more global in terms of intercourse, economy, and culture; communism could have become a candidate, but lost its hegemony after the failure in Germany. Therefore, what is lacking and needs to be sought for is “the idea unifying world history.”⁴ He then turns to the situation in East Asia, i.e., Japan, China, and Manchukuo, which has thus far never formed a regional unity. Although it is not yet certain which country—Japan or China—takes the lead, he is convinced that unification itself is on the horizon. This, he insists, represents a “world historical” task. “The day when the East is formed must be the day when the world is formed in the true sense at the same time.”⁵ In order to hold hegemony, Japan must accomplish this “world historical mission.” Moreover, Miki argues that solution

³ See Miki Kiyoshi, “Shina jihen no sekaishi teki igi” [The world historical significance of the China Incident], ed. Yonetani Masafumi in *Hihiyō kūkan* [Critical space] no. 19 (1998), 32-39. It is important to point out that his project was motivated by his conception of historical time that tried to radicalize Hegelian dialectical philosophy of history by both temporalizing it based on the time of the present moment of decision and spatializing it from a more global perspective. This philosophy of history derives from his active confrontation with the impact of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. For a more detailed discussion of Miki’s notion of temporality, Naoki Sakai, “Hiteisei to rekishishugi no jikan: 1930 nendai no jissen tetsugaku to Ajia Taiheiyō sensō ki no Ienaga, Maruyama shisōshi” [Negativity and historicist time: the practical philosophy in the 1930s and the intellectual histories of Ienaga and Maruyama] in *Marukusushugi toiu keiken: 1930-40 nendai Nihon no rekishigaku* [The experience of Marxism: Japanese historiography in the 1930s and the 1940s], ed. Isomae Junichi and Harry Harootunian (Tokyo: Aoki shoten, 2008), 261-308.

⁴ Miki, “Shina jihen no sekaishi teki igi,” 34.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

of the problem of capitalism must accompany this mission. Otherwise, it cannot be world historical, he emphasizes. Thus, he concludes: “Japan’s world historical mission is to grasp the fundamental principle on its own that competes with communism. Spatially, it means the unification of East Asia, and temporally, the resolution of capitalism society.”⁶ In this way, the term “world history” pointed to the dimension of a universal principle for a new social formation.

Miki’s thesis laid out in this talk was later formulated through the group discussion into its official manifesto entitled *Principles of Thought for a New Japan*.⁷ If many progressive bureaucrats and technocrats, as well as former leftist intelligentsia, were attracted by this East Asian Cooperative Community, as they actually were, it was because they had the high expectation that the project, especially the resolution of the problem of capitalism, would rationalize and modernize the social system.⁸ In this way, these intellectuals made a dangerous gamble of seeking for social transformation through wartime mobilization. It meant that they were getting involved in Japanese imperialism. What was ironic, however, is that the East Asian Cooperative Community itself failed because of the prolongation of the Sino-Japanese War and the reactions from the conservatives and rightist at home. By 1940, as Japan expanded the frontline to the South East Asia, the agenda was replaced by *Dai Tōa kyōeiken* or the “Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere,” a more openly imperialist policy.

⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷ See Miki Kiyoshi, *Shin Nihon no shiō genri* [Principles of thought for a new Japan] in *Miki Kiyoshi zenshū* [Collected works of Miki Kiyoshi], vol. 17 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1968), 507-533.

⁸ In fact, during this wartime period, the implementation of various social policies enhanced national integration and social equality (*Gleichschaltung* or enforced homogeneity) in terms of class, gender and ethnicity; otherwise, the government could not have mobilized and motivated the socially marginal or excluded populations into the total war. At the same time, the mobilization promoted rational and functional deployment of the human and natural resources. Yamanouchi Yasushi describes this functionalist reorganization as “a shift from a class to a system society.” It is important to note that this shift also represents an international trend in both fascist and the New Deal type countries. In addition, it also prepared for the postwar Japanese national society. See Yamanouchi Yasushi’s and other essays included in Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann and Ryūichi Narita ed., *Total War and ‘Modernization’* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Program, 1998).

However, the discourse of world history did not cease to exercise its influence. It was right before the outbreak of Japan's war with the United States and other allied countries in December 1941 that the other Kyoto philosophers Kōyama Iwao, Nishitani Keiji, and Kōsaka Masaaki, and the Kyoto historian Suzuki Shigetaka gave a round-table discussion entitled "*Sekaishi teki tachiba to Nihon*" or "The World Historical Standpoint and Japan." Repeating Miki, perhaps unwittingly, they pointed to the crisis of European universality and identity, and claims that Japan should come and represent a new world history. World history, they argued, does not contradict nationality, but derives from profound national subjectivity that they describe as *moralische Energie* (moral energy), using a term by the German historian Leopold von Ranke. Here one can see one of the central claims of the orthodox Kyoto philosophy that nationalism and universalism are not two opposite principles, but tied together. This universalized nationalism can be taken as defining imperialism or imperial nationalism.⁹ If this is the case, the world history represents the aspect of universalism of this nationalism. Because of its timely publication of this symposium, however, the word *sekaishi* gained currency. Moreover, there was a psychological background to this popularity. As Takeuchi Yoshimi noted, the war with the "West" and Japan's initial victory in the battles released intellectuals from the moral guilt they had felt about Japan's invasion against China, making them idealize the Pacific War as a just war.¹⁰ One might add that it also liberated them from the inferiority complex against the "West." In this way, "The World Historical Standpoint and Japan," along with another famous symposium *Kindai no chōkoku*, or "Overcoming Modernity," held in

⁹ For an incisive critique of this standpoint of the Kyoto philosophers, see Naoki Sakai, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism" In *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 153-76.

¹⁰ Takeuchi, "Overcoming Modernity," 121.

the summer of 1942, became symbolic events.¹¹ Thus, the phrase “overcoming modernity” came to be associated with the “world historical standpoint” and, in fact, two of the Kyoto scholars, Nishitani and Suzuki, also participated in the latter symposium. The Kyoto scholars gave two more sessions in which they legitimated by their notion of world history the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and the total war that would emancipate Asia from Anglo-Saxon capitalism, colonialism, and racism. In other words, their philosophical conception of “total war” represented an ultimate form of their world history that justified the current engagements as serving for a future purpose of the new world order. As I discuss in the fourth chapter, it does not mean, however, that their standpoint served as an official ideology of the Japanese government. On the contrary, the Kyoto scholars were under the constant threat from the Army and the fanatic rightist camp who considered their “world historical” standpoint as too much too liberal, Western, and therefore anti-Japanese. As recently discovered documents testify, they held secret meetings with the Japanese Navy; they intended, as the discoverer interprets, to discuss how to end the war at the earliest point and to change the regime of the Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki of the Army.¹² However, I will argue that this interpretation is not fully supported by the documents or the public discussions of the philosophers. Above all else, from whatever good intentions they acted, it does not alter the fact that their basic argument indeed endorsed Japanese empire. Rather, I will interpret their discussion of total war as revealing the internal contradictions of their very idea of world history.

¹¹ See Richard Calichman, ed. and trans., *Overcoming Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). For a thick description of this symposium, see Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 34-94.

¹² See Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun: Shin shiryō ‘Ōshima memo’ wo megutte* [The Kyoto school and the Japanese Navy: on the newly discovered ‘Ōshima memorandum’] (Tokyo: PHP, 2001). For an appropriate criticism of Ōhashi’s interpretation, Iwasaki Minoru, “Sensō no shūji, sekaishi no kyōhaku” [The rhetoric of war and the coercions of world history] in *Sōryokusenka no chi to seido* [Knowledge and institutions under total war], ed. Naoki Sakai et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002), 111-38.

In this thesis, I will claim that the idea of world history was an instrumental notion for the wartime Japanese empire without which it could not have fully justified its war efforts. To be sure, there are different versions and conceptions of “world history”; the one that Miki proposed and the other that Kōyama and others advocated had distinctive political and historical meanings in different contexts. Some scholars in the postwar described the former as the left-wing Kyoto school, and the latter as the right-wing. They often evaluated the East Asian Cooperative Community as a more critical intervention to the situation; Miki’s death in prison in September 1945, that is, after Japan’s defeat—he had been arrested and put in jail in the spring of 1945 on suspicion of violation of the Peace Preservation Law—would have aroused sympathy for, and, in a sense, mythified, this tragic philosopher. However, both parties do not differ very much in that they sought to rationalize (in the double sense of reforming and idealizing) Japanese imperialism. Yet, it does not necessarily mean that the discourse of world history was officially sanctioned doctrine of the empire. In fact, as I have suggested, both had to face tremendous resistance and attacks from the conservative forces. Nevertheless, it is also important to point out that the notion of world history was not the monopoly of the Kyoto school of philosophy, left or right. The Japanese Romantic writer Yasuda Yojūrō is a case in point, as I argue in my chapters. Although he has been regarded as a quintessentially traditionalist thinker, he, too, made a strong appeal to the notion of world history by April 1938, independently of the Kyoto school. This fact suggests that the term world history was one of the influential phrases circulating in the discursive space of the Japanese empire.

In general, the discussions of world history sought to show a vision of a new world order with imperial Japan at its center, while criticizing the problems and contradictions of Eurocentrism. Based on the descriptions so far, it is possible to point out several important characteristics common to different versions. First, the

proponents of world history addressed the issue of universality. In the present as the time of crisis and world wars, they claimed, the so-called “West” cannot be universal anymore. Yet, this does not mean the same thing as anti-Western pan-Asianism. But rather, the discussions of world history performatively showed that universality is a form of hegemony and conflict. Second, world history represented a call for creating a new world order. In other words, it is not limited to serving as a regulative framework for objectively narrativizing a story of the nations in the world based on past facts and events, but involves a subjective, practical movement towards the future. This is the reason why the question of temporality becomes a decisive problem in the discussions of world history. I will seek to show the aporias inherent in this world historical temporality in the fourth chapter. And third, world history intended to integrate and mobilize the nation(s) as the subjects that practice this world historical mission. It meant organizing the nation into the total war domestically, and a call for other Asian nations to participate in this mission externally; it especially aimed to mobilize the populations in the colonial possessions as new national subjects. With these three features, the discourse of world history could serve for the empire.

Until recently, the discussions of world history by the Japanese intellectuals have not been paid adequate attention and put to thematic considerations as a form of universalism. The major reason for this, I argue, was that Japan’s claim for the world history implied a challenge to the existing economy of the Eurocentric knowledge system. The discourse that distinguishes the “West” as universal and the “non-West” as particular has been accepted as the axiomatic epistemology of the modern world not only by the West, but by the non-West as well.¹³ According to this schema of knowledge, the West is supposed to be the observing and analyzing subject of theory,

¹³ Naoki Sakai, “The Dislocation of the West and the Status of Humanities” in *Traces*, vol.1 (Ithaca: Traces Inc., 2001), 71-94.

while the non-West represents the empirical object of observation. This was the discursive implication of the duality of Kantian subjectivity as the transcendental and empirical subjects. The universal claim of “world history” on the part of the “non-West” was something that, by definition, defied perception and understanding through the existing framework. It means that the claim for universality on the part of what is in the particular position essentially implies a conflict and even violence, because it will put into question the authority of the existing universality and make a demand for re-articulating the hierarchy between the universal and the particular. The true meaning of what Takeuchi Yoshimi once described as the “aporias of modern Japanese history” must lie in this recognition. Although he seemed to presuppose a rather substantial difference between the West and the non-West when he mentioned the “traditional oppositions” between “reactionism and restoration” and so forth, the so-called “aporias” can be taken as pointing to the conflict implied in the dimension of universality.

However, the claim of Japanese world history failed because, as Takeuchi said, “[Western] imperialism cannot be overthrown by [Japanese] imperialism.”¹⁴ “[It] is nevertheless also true,” he continues, “that [Japanese] imperialism cannot be judged by [Western] imperialism.”¹⁵ While he may seem to try to defend Japanese imperialism, his point is that this conflict is the one between two particulars that assume the title of the universal. In other words, he is saying that Japanese imperial world history repeated the same imperial, that is, particular universalism as the West, while criticizing the latter’s contradictions. Nevertheless, the demand of the defeated particular universalism would not disappear unless its claim for universality is examined as such. In fact, the Kyoto philosophers, for instance, were convinced that

¹⁴ Ibid., 124.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the idea of world history was defeated as a matter of fact, but not defeated as an idea. Such conviction, as I show in the fourth chapter, has been transmitted to their students and is still alive as deeply repressed resentment, like a specter. At times, it manifests itself as a demand for the rehabilitation of the former claim as it was. To be sure, such a revisionist phenomenon of “acting-out” is quite ordinary among defeated and traumatized nationalisms, but this sentiment among the heirs of the Japanese empire would be reinforced because it proposed a world historical, universal claim. For this reason, the profoundly self-deceptive notion that Japan’s “Greater East Asian War” sought to liberate Asia from the West is still persistent among Japanese conservatives. When he wrote the piece on “overcoming modernity,” Takeuchi was acutely aware of such a problem. In this sense, his writing can be said to represent a form of “working-through.”¹⁶

In the world after the WWII, however, in spite of decolonization and the rise of the Third World-ism, the discursive economy of the West and the non-West seems to have been restored and reorganized under the regime of the Cold War. As Harry Harootunian argues, it was precisely in this period that “area studies” was established as knowledge institutions in US academia.¹⁷ Under the framework of the modernization theory, which was dominant until the 1970s, non-Western societies in question were simultaneously homogenized according to the stages of linear development and made to be heterogeneous because of the core cultural values that were considered different from the Western observer. As a result, the claim for universality of the non-Western world history was not recognized. As long as one puts

¹⁶ For a historical use of the psychoanalytic notions of “acting-out” and “working-through,” see Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 2001).

¹⁷ For a critical history of the area studies and an alternative practice to it, see Harry Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

oneself in the position of the universal, it is difficult to recognize the claim of universality by the other. In addition, addressing the issue of Japan as a multiethnic empire would necessarily invite a self-reflexive question of whether or not one's own universal standpoint is imperial. For these reasons, the Kyoto school of philosophy was understood first and foremost in terms of the "Oriental" thought such as Buddhist philosophy, while the Japanese Romantics were regarded predominantly as aesthetic and ethnic culturalism, i.e., particularism. Such views in part stem from the now-questionable paradigm that looks at German Romanticism and Idealism as reactionary cultural forms of the late developer. At the same time, the framework that divides the world into the West and the non-West and regards them in terms of a binary opposition between universal and particular was shared by most of the progressive scholars in the postwar Japan: Marxists and the civil society school such as Maruyama Masao alike interpreted prewar Japan as the emperor system fascism dominated by pre-modern feudal remnants, and this view was predominant until the 1970s.¹⁸ Thus, a view that understands wartime Japan as a time period of particularistic, irrational ethnic nationalism was continually reproduced in the postwar Japan quite for a long time. As a result, the prewar history of the colonial empire was forgotten, and the myth of a homogeneous Japanese nation was created in which academic discourse was also involved. In creating such a view, both Japan and the United States were complicit in an asymmetrical manner.¹⁹

In this way, the problematic of imperial world history as discussed by Japanese intellectuals has long been made obscure. What was most invisible, however, was the

¹⁸ For a more nuanced and fair view of the multiple meanings and emancipative potentials of the immediate postwar debates on *shutaisei* (subjectivity) in which these scholars participated, see J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁹ For a fundamental strategy, as well as diverse approaches, to problematize this traditional image, see Naoki Sakai, Brett de Bary and Toshio Iyotani, ed., *Deconstructing Nationality* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Program, 2005).

Romantic world history. Yasuda Yojūro was considered an exemplar of irrational anti-modernist. In this sense, his writing represents a case that best conforms to the binary scheme of the dominant discourse that was practiced in both Japan and the United States. As I discuss in detail in the first chapter, this view interpreted Yasuda according to the binary opposition between universalism and particularism, assigning him the latter. His elusive Romantic irony also obscured his project, because it constantly invalidates a univocal meaning. “The intellectual role played by Yasuda,” Takeuchi maintained, “was that of eradicating thought through the destruction of all categories.”²⁰ Nevertheless, or precisely because of this, Takeuchi saw some potential in Yasuda’s irony. He first evaluated the entire symposium in terms of the question of the “aporias”:

That the symposium produced such poor results...stems from the symposium’s failure to dissolve the war’s double nature, that is to say, its failure to objectify the aporias of modern Japanese history *qua* aporias.²¹

What he meant by the “double nature” of war is the duality that Japan’s Pacific War was imperialist and anti-imperialist at once. He then went on to say that the symposium could not “exploit Yasuda’s destructive force toward other ends.”²² In other words, Takeuchi was saying that Yasuda’s irony might have helped identify the aporias as aporias. While this statement itself is somewhat ambiguous, it can be said that Takeuchi was bestowing high praise on Yasuda by this comment. As I have said, an aporia refers to a conflict that is generated when the relationship between the universal and the particular is re-articulated; when the particular puts the existing universal in question, the universal becomes potentially absent; the particular, however, is not yet recognized as the universal. In so doing, an aporia as an aporia

²⁰ Takeuchi, "Overcoming Modernity," 143.

²¹ Ibid., 146.

²² Ibid.

reveals the universal as conflictive and yet amorphous and indefinite. This is the very structure of irony. As I discuss in the second chapter, irony, as Yasuda conceived of it through his reading of the German Romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel, is a continual alternation of the opposite poles, which deconstructs any binary oppositions. Irony makes it possible to keep the tension, and suspend the dichotomy, between the universal and the particular, without reducing them into each other or creating a hierarchy between them. Takeuchi recognized this potential of irony in discussing the universal claim, but not universalism per se, of wartime Japanese thought. However, Takeuchi did not mention Yasuda's project of Romantic world history. Nor did he notice how Romantic world history emerged from such an irony. In the third chapter, however, I will claim that this very indefinite universality of irony that derives from suspension of the binary oppositions could be, and actually was, imperial.

Interestingly enough, the Kyoto school's notion of world history seems to show a contrastive case. By seeking to represent the universal standpoint, their discussion fell into unsolvable contradictions which I describe "antinomies." If irony refers to a continual alternation of one meaning and the other, antinomy represents a coexistence of mutually contradictory statements that correspond to the finite and infinite standpoints respectively. Therefore, while irony undermines the very notion of identity and distinction, antinomy derives from the logical category of contradiction. At the same time, however, both antinomy and irony virtually destruct the distinction between one thing and its other. I will claim that these features characterized the writings and discussions by Yasuda Yojūrō and the Kyoto philosophers respectively, producing enormous consequences in their notions of world history. In the following chapters, I will seek to identify how irony and antinomy are at work in their history of empire.

CHAPTER 1

Polemics of Reading:

Yasuda Yojūrō and the Question of Imperialism

In this sort of irony, everything should be playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden...It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication. It is the freest of all licenses, for by its means one transcends oneself; and yet it is also the most lawful, for it is absolutely necessary.

—Friedrich Schlegel, “Lyceum Fragments 108”²³

Literary critic Yasuda Yojūrō (1910-1981) was the leading figure of *Nihon romanha* or Japanese Romantics. *Nihon romanha* was the title of a journal published by a group of young writers and critics who were influenced by German Romanticism. *Nihon romanha* was their *Athenaeum*, that is, a Japanese analogue of the late-eighteenth century journal of German Romanticism. The members included Yasuda and former proletarian writers such as Kamei Katsuichirō and Hayashi Fusao. These writers, especially Yasuda, appealed to young readers in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, who, after the demise of the leftist movements, found themselves in the desperate situation of total war and mobilization that began with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937.

Yasuda studied German literature, especially Friedrich Hölderlin and early German Romanticism such as Friedrich Schlegel at Tokyo Imperial University. While he wrote several pieces of fiction as well as novels at the beginning of his career, his major field was literary criticism. From early on, his essays were characterized by his use of “Romantic irony.” Yasuda became well-known for his award-winning 1936

²³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, Trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 156.

essays, *Nihon no hashi* (Japanese bridges). In particular, the essay with the same title reflected upon the artifice of Japanese bridges both in actual history and in literary representation, and discussed their symbolic cultural meaning by comparing them with foreign bridges. It tends to be interpreted as a work that pursues the aesthetic authenticity of Japanese culture. In the wartime period he became one of Japan's most popular writers as he perhaps not coincidentally became more obsessed with Japanese classical literature and the cultural heritage of Japanese emperors in history, for instance, in *Gotobain* (the ex-emperor Gotoba, 1939) or in *Man'yōshū no seishin* (the spirit of Man'yōshū, 1942).

In the postwar, his wartime literary activity naturally created much controversy because Yasuda was regarded as having justified and supported Japan's Asia-Pacific War. The debate still continues to the present day, and studies of Yasuda's politics have been deeply divided and polemical in nature. However, there is one basic premise shared by most of the existing studies, i.e., Yasuda as an ethnic nationalist. Due to this view, the Yasuda scholarship lacks or is made blind to the context of Japan's colonial empire.

As I show in the next chapters, Yasuda made a trip to the Korean Peninsula and the Chinese Continent in 1938 at the time of the Sino-Japanese War. His travelogues clearly attest to Yasuda's deep involvement in Japanese imperialism. As a matter of fact, this text is notorious and often cited as the very evidence for Yasuda's collaboration with the wartime regime. Curiously enough, however, despite the fact that the question of Yasuda's war guilt has been much debated, the narrow focus on this issue tends to make Yasuda's imperial nationalism invisible and prevent from analyzing its structure. This is the reason why it is crucial to critically anatomize the existing studies as such. In the following, in order to clarify what is at stake in my rereading, I will display the basic traits and limitations of the existing paradigm as

exemplified by Hashikawa Bunzō and others. I will then thematically discuss Kevin Doak and Alan Tansman in particular, because their interpretations are considered to be definitive studies on Yasuda Yojūrō and the Japanese Romantics in English literature.

A Polemical Legacy: the Paradigm and the Debates in the Yasuda Yojūrō Studies

It was political scientist Hashikawa Bunzō (1922-1983) that took the initiative in discussing the role of Yasuda and the Japanese Romantics in his pioneering work, *Nihon romanha hihan josetsu* (Introduction to a critique of Japanese Romantics).²⁴ As a college student in the wartime period, Hashikawa, like many of his peers, was an enthusiastic reader of Yasuda Yojūrō. Therefore, in writing his critical essays, he was first and foremost motivated by his desire to understand and objectify his generational experience and the secrets of such enormous influence of Yasuda's writings. It not only provides his first-hand testimony about Yasuda reception during wartime, but proposes a set of important theses on the Japanese Romantic movement, which he points out was represented by Yasuda Yojūrō, not by other members such as Kamei Katsuichirō.

While pointing to three sources of Yasuda's thought, i.e., Marxism, National Studies, and German Romanticism, Hashikawa characterizes Yasuda's writings as "aesthetic patriotism" (*tanbi teki patorioiteizumu*) whose literary and apolitical standpoint paradoxically addressed the relationship between "beauty and politics." (57) However, how can the three sources as diverse as these lead to "aesthetic patriotism"? A common thread of these currents seems to be anti-modernism. With his ethics of conviction and feeling modeled on *kokugaku* or the National Studies, Yasuda

²⁴ Hashikawa Bunzō, *Nihon roman ha hihan josetsu* [Introduction to a critique of Japanese romantics] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1995 [1960]).

negated, Hashikawa claims, the “logic of the Civilization and Enlightenment” as the keynote of the modern Japanese state. While distancing himself from the so-called “Japanism” as another ideology of the “situation theory” (*jōsei ron*) based on calculation and instrumental reason, Yasuda became more and more inclined toward “absolute piety” and “agrarianism” throughout and after the wartime period. (33) At the same time, however, Hashikawa emphasizes that Yasuda’s anti-modernism represented “a depoliticized and emotionalized revolutionary thought,” and therefore was not a form of traditionalism that would advocate a return to the past. (33) On the contrary, Japanese Romanticism emerged out of a desperate situation in which the leftist movements had been suppressed with the socio-economic crisis only deepening. Pointing out the fact that Yasuda himself was exposed to Marxism at the Osaka Higher School, Hashikawa claims that Japanese Romantics as a “revolutionary resonance that accompanied the early communist theories and movements from the beginning.” (33) He continues:

While accompanying the actual revolutionary movement, Japanese Romantics, I think, crystallized itself as a sort of equally radical anti-imperialism by mediating and transitioning its inner necessity of failure to an apolitical figure. (33)

In a situation like this where one cannot publicly express social criticism, a sense of crisis becomes that of despair, and negation both radicalized and introverted. It was all too natural that “irony” determined the basic tone of his writing. It is precisely here that all the elements of Yasuda’s thought—the National Studies, Marxism, and German Romanticism—converge. “If these heterogeneous ideas found a moment of unity in Yasuda,” Hashikawa says, “what constitutes its integrity is nothing but the idea of “irony.” (38)

To explain “Romantic irony,” Hashikawa employs G. W. F. Hegel’s and Carl Schmitt’s critical accounts of German Romanticism. Put simply, their understanding

of Romantic irony is that it relativizes and annihilates every substantial matter such as truth and morality into mere artistic semblance, while preserving absoluteness for the ironizing I.²⁵ In *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetic*, Hegel relentlessly criticized Friedrich Schlegel for his empty “self-conceit” (*Eitelkeit*) that is futile, arbitrary and morally irresponsible. Likewise, Schmitt’s *Political Romanticism* rejected political philosophy of Romanticism in Schlegel, Adam Müller, and others. “He [a romantic] ironically avoids,” Schmitt says, “the constraints of objectivity and guards himself against becoming committed to anything. The reservation of all infinite possibilities lies in irony.”²⁶ He famously describes the metaphysical and rhetorical structure of romantic thinking as subjectified “occasionalism,” which had two consequences.²⁷ First, it led to a tendency for “conflation of concepts” and “suspension of antithesis by a higher third.” Second, the greatest events, like a war or a revolution, were made into a mere “occasion” for aesthetic poeticizing for the Romantics. “Political activity,” Schmitt claims, “is not possible in this way. But criticism is, which can discuss everything and inflate ideologically, revolution as well as restoration, war and peace, nationalism and internationalism, imperialism and its renunciation.”²⁸ Political Romanticism, therefore, would cause passivity and lack of commitment. While such an interpretation of Romanticism is certainly debatable, Schmitt betrays that his own

²⁵ See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetic*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet and ed. Michael Inwood (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 69-75. The negativity of irony on the one hand, ends up with “the futility of all that is matter of fact, or moral and of substantive import in itself; the nothingness of all that is objective, and that has essential and actual value” (72); and on the other, it leads to “a craving for the solid and substantial, for determinate and essential interests” (ibid.), which constitutes “the source of morbid saintliness and yearning” (73). This traditional view presupposes that the Romantics were dependent upon Fichte’s transcendental philosophy of the self-creating and self-annihilating I.

²⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986), 73.

²⁷ Occasionalism is a notion used by the philosophers in the seventeenth to eighteenth century such as Nicolas Malebranche who explained the opposition and interaction between the Cartesian substances, i.e., *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, as a mere *occasio* of a higher cause that is God. See Schmitt, *ibid.*, 78-108.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

stakes are involved here.²⁹ That is, Schmitt warned against Romanticism so vehemently, because it would undermine his own standpoint of “decisionism.” In fact, what he described as “suspension of antithesis” and “conflation of concepts” evades stark binary oppositions required for distinguishing friend and enemy, a distinction that Schmitt claims constitutes “the political.”³⁰ In this regard, the recent studies of early German Romanticism have revealed its remarkable resemblance with contemporary perspectives such as deconstruction.

Hashikawa obviously had a critical intent in deploying these refutations of Romanticism. Especially, Schmitt’s account of occasionalism, Hashikawa thought, explains equivocality of Yasuda’s politics well. Yet, his mode of “criticism” was somewhat different from the sweeping, even prosecutorial denunciations. In fact, his attitude is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, he admits that in a desperate situation like the so-called Fifteen-Year War, there were few other political alternatives than aesthetic resistance. On the other, however, he claims Yasuda’s aestheticization of decadence, catastrophe and death into the wartime period attracted his generation the most and therefore was one of the most effective ideologies in mobilizing the youth.

While Hashikawa’s interpretation, which captures well the complexity of Yasuda’s thought, set the horizon for later interpretations, the profound elusiveness and equivocality of his literary politics has invited various attempts at explicating it. In particular, since the 1980s in which Yasuda passed away and his *Collected Works*

²⁹ Intellectual historian Frederick Beiser criticizes such an interpretation. “Schmitt holds, for example, that aestheticism is definitive of the romantic attitude. Yet it characterizes only the initial stages of the romantic movement; after 1799 the leading romantics abandoned their aestheticism in favor of religion. Schmitt also presupposes that the romantics’ aestheticism was apolitical, as if it were entirely unmotivated by social and political concerns. A more careful examination of their early writings reveals, however, that their aesthetics was primarily dictated by their social and political objectives.” Beiser further suggests that “such an enterprise reveals his [Schmitt’s] implicit belief that it is a political threat.” See Frederick Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790-1800* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 225.

³⁰ See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26.

were published, it can be said that Yasuda Yojūrō has been rehabilitated. His writings were in a sense rediscovered as having anticipated “postmodernism” rather than simple anti-modernism. It is also important to note that this revival coincided with Japan’s mainstream society becoming increasingly conservative. At the same time, however, Yasuda studies have inevitably brought about a number of polemics, because the topic often remained centered on the question of his involvement in the wartime regime, as well as his war guilt. In addition, there was a new development that Yasuda studies and debates have become internationalized. Needless to say, such crude classification ignores the different nuances of diverse existing studies.

On the one hand, some commentators continue Hashikawa’s critical assessment. They examine Japanese Romanticism’s implication with cultural nationalism and even with fascism, pointing out that the ideology of aesthetic authenticity promoted the wartime regime. Scholars in the United States such as Kevin Doak and Alan Tansman, for instance, represent this trend. Rather than just dismissing Yasuda as a reactionary ideology, they stress that Yasuda’s apparent reaction to modernity is itself a modern phenomenon or modernist attitude. Yet, even as they criticize the Japanese Romantics, they still presuppose a simplistic schema that as a conflict between universal modernity and particular cultures, which virtually coincides with that of the “West” and the rest (or Japan). This binary opposition derives in part from a rather traditional view of Romanticism in general. I will thematically examine their interpretations shortly.

In contrast to these more or less critical interpretations of Yasuda’s politics, other scholars argue that Yasuda was an aesthete immersed in Japan’s cultural traditions and therefore was essentially anti-political. Moreover, the claim is that his Romantic irony should be regarded as a rhetorical resistance that nullifies the dominant discourse at the time. For instance, in *Yasuda Yojūrō*, written in memoriam

of Yasuda's death in 1981, literary critic Oketani Hideaki provides an immanent and nuanced reading of his texts in a chronological order. He rejects unfair readings and crude denunciations of Yasuda's literature, pointing out that Yasuda's seemingly fanatic statements were actually directed against the wartime ideology of the "national policies" (*kokusaku*), including both "Japanism" and the logic of the "Civilization and Enlightenment." In addition, he makes an important point about Yasuda's irony. By paying close attention to Yasuda's own context and his take on the Japanese literary tradition, he argues that it is not entirely reducible to the Romantic irony of Friedrich Schlegel. Oketani later specifies one significant source of Yasuda's irony in the Tokugawa nativist Fujitani Mitsue (1768-1823)'s notion of "*tōgo*" (indirect, reversed way of saying) as opposed to *chokugen* (direct language).³¹ By the same token, conservative critic Fukuda Kazuya in *Nippon no kakyō* (Japan's homeland) launches a polemic against existing interpretations as represented by Hashikawa's. Fukuda

³¹ He quotes Fujitani's 1808 text, *Kojiki tomoshibi ōmune* [The principles of illuminating the Kojiki]: "Within the minds of human beings, there is that which cannot be interrogated. Therefore, since one cannot use direct language to reach that part, in our great country we make use of a miraculous method. When one uses *tōgo*, the kami are there.... Thus, *tōgo* is the border between speaking and not speaking. The essence of *tōgo* is when one wants to say what one thinks, but instead says what one does not think." (Translation borrowed from Susan L. Burns, *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of the Community in Early Modern Japan* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2003], 138.) See Oketani Hideaki, *Shōwa seishin shi* [A spiritual history of Shōwa] (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 1992), 197. However, even if Oketani's point is taken, it would go too far to eliminate German Romanticism's influence on Yasuda. For Fujitani's *tōgo*, see Sakabe Megumi, "Kotodama—Fujitani Mitsue no kotodama ron ichimen" [Spirit of words—one aspect of Fujitani Mitsue's theory of spirit of words] in *Kamen no kaishakugaku* [Hermeneutics of persona] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1976), 211-39. Pointing out that the word *tōgo* has two senses of "*hiyu*" (metaphor) and "*soto ni sorasu*" (turning away to the outside), Sakabe compares these with "metonymy" and "metaphor" in Roman Jakobson's sense. One might be tempted to compare it with "trope" as "turning away" that Paul de Man discussed in his essay on Friedrich Schlegel. If this is the case, Yasuda and Schlegel would come closer to each other through Fujitani. For more on Fujitani, see Naoki Sakai, "'Jō' to 'kanshō'—seiai no jōcho to kyōkan to shutai teki gijutsu wo megutte" ["Feeling" and "sentiment"—concerning the emotion and sympathy of sexuality, and subjective technology] in *Jendaa no nihonshi* [Japanese history of gender], ed. Wakita Haruko and Susan Hanley (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1995), 137-77. Sakai argues that Fujitani's poetics discloses the essentially "transvestite" nature of gender-role playing, as well as the "feeling" as the site for social encounter and antagonism. He also suggests that in Fujitani, the "feeling," is only negatively presentable through *tōgo*, because it is different from "sentiments" which can be represented within the dominant ideology. If Yasuda Yojūrō relied upon Fujitani's theory of *tōgo*, it is no wonder that Yasuda created a transvestite imperialism, as it were, through a female figure named Kawahara Misako. See my concluding argument of this chapter.

vehemently contests his presupposition that suggests that Yasuda was a former leftist and even converted from the movement.³² This legend, he insists, is not only factually ungrounded, but this sort of reading is theoretically problematic because it reduces literature into a political ideology. Instead, he argues that Yasuda should be taken as a modernist writer who pursued purely artistic significations that are independent of the referential reality. Moreover, Yasuda's nationalism, he claims, was a necessary consequence of his modernism. As I will show later, it is interesting to see that both Fukuda and Tansman pay close attention to the dimension of Yasuda's language while at the same time providing diametrically opposite evaluations of his politics.

Thus, these polemics revolved around whether one should evaluate Yasuda's politics, and Romantic irony in particular, positively or negatively, and whether or not Yasuda's irony derives directly and singularly from, and therefore reducible to, German Romanticism. This, however, begs another question of how to understand German Romanticism itself, and, as I show later, one of the biggest shortcomings of the existing studies is that they are severed from the recent developments in the field of German Romanticism.

Despite the seemingly antagonistic oppositions, however, these interpretations on Yasuda and Japanese Romantics do share some basic presuppositions: first, their movement pursued aesthetic politics; second, its ideology represented anti-civilizational, ethnic nationalism (as opposed to state nationalism and imperialism); and third, its politicality is concentrated in the use of Romantic irony.

I agree that Romantic irony is central in Yasuda's aesthetic politics. Moreover, I do agree that he was a nationalist. But the crucial question is what kind of nationalist he was. I argue that he was an imperial nationalist, as opposed to ethnic nationalist, who appealed to a universal "world history." Surprisingly enough, the developments

³² See Fukuda Kazuya, *Nippon no kakyō* [Japan's homeland] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1993), 115-120.

of Japanese empire in East Asia, for Yasuda, marked a turning point in “world history” that is comparable to the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution. Because of the dominant interpretation, this fact has been either consistently overlooked or taken as a mere demagoguery. To be sure, Yasuda’s involvement in wartime Japanese discourse in a broad sense has been the very question that has been disputed. But the approach taken was to exclusively ask whether or not, and to what extent, he supported, justified and promoted Japan’s war efforts. In other words, the “war of invasion” was made to serve for shorthand for “imperialism.” However, this perspective tended to identify imperialism with its extreme and final manifestations, running the risk of minimizing the question of the colonial rule by Japanese empire. This means a paradox of forgetting empire through discussing the wartime regime. The fact was, however, that Yasuda legitimized Japan’s colonialism in Korea by the notion of world history.

Here, too, Hashikawa Bunzō is a case in point.³³ He does address the fact that Yasuda was involved in Japanese colonialism in Korea. He mentions that Yasuda in his 1938 travelogues on colonial Korea celebrated the so-called Japanist activists and intellectuals there who actively collaborated with Japanese colonial policy of “*naisen ittai*” (Japan and Korea as a single body). Hashikawa criticizes Yasuda saying,

The existence of these facts [Korean collaboration with *naisen ittai*] he described here cannot be denied. Still, Yasuda does not feel it necessary at all to take into account the fact that there were hidden cases to the contrary...It would be undeniable that he was completely impotent in grasping not only the historical image of war since the “China Incident,” but the emergent reality of the national resistance (*minzoku kōsō*).” (175-6)

³³ Kawamura Minato addresses the general question of Yasuda’s encounter with Asia and its possible influence on him (i.e., Yasuda’s so-called Asianism in the postwar). While he rightly recognizes that the discourse of world history was central to Yasuda’s narrative, he tends to read Yasuda’s postwar “Asiatic” “pacifism” into his prewar writing. Moreover, Kawamura does not examine Yasuda’s actual meeting with the Korean intellectuals and its political implications. This is very unfortunate because Kawamura is one of the leading scholars who problematized pre-war Japanese writers’ involvement with Japanese imperialism in Asia. See Kawamura Minato, “Yasuda Yojūrō no bōrei” [The specter of Yasuda Yojūrō] in *Gunzō* (March 1996), 162-182.

Hashikawa also detects “sacred shamelessness” and “terrible nationalistic indulgence (*minzoku shugi teki tandeki*)” (67). By the same token, Hashikawa refers to the famous case of Yi Kwangsu who converted to Japanism, and describes his essay on his experience of conversion, entitled “*Gyōja*” (ascetic devotee), as a “terribly ugly theory of conversion.” (83) “It brings home to me,” he continues, “that the problem of colonial imperialism in its most existential form concerns beauty and ugliness of the human soul.” (83) In this way, Hashikawa denounces Yasuda, as well as the pro-Japanese collaborators like Yi, basically from moralistic reasons. Moreover, he takes for granted the framework of ethnic nationalism (*minzoku shugi*) on both sides of the colonizer and the colonized here. By appealing to the anti-colonial “national resistance,” he seems to avoid fully analyzing how and why Japanese colonial policy could have attracted and mobilized the colonial subjects. Above all else, Hashikawa misrecognizes Yasuda as ethnic nationalist, which is not the case at all, as I will show in the following chapters.

In this way, the issue of Yasuda’s “colonial imperialism” formed a blind spot, which has been a predominant tradition in the studies of Yasuda Yojūrō in the postwar. I would like to claim, however, that it is necessary to take Schmitt’s remark seriously. Let me quote his statement again:

Political activity is not possible in this way. But criticism is, which can discuss everything and inflate ideologically, revolution as well as restoration, war and peace, nationalism and internationalism, imperialism and its renunciation.

What is especially suggestive in our context is that Schmitt clearly admits that political Romanticism can be imperialist. To be sure, his point is that, once political Romantics advocate imperialism, it would immediately be canceled out by its renunciation. However, what if a denial or even critique of imperialism can be most effectively imperialist or constitutive part of imperialism? What if this oscillation derives from

the equivocality of irony? And what if this imperialism was not so much a mere outcome and contingent ideological content of subjectified “occasionalism” as was necessitated by constantly relativizing movement of irony?

In the following I will articulate my critical stakes vis-à-vis the existing studies in the form of a commentaries on Kevin Michael Doak’s *Dreams of Difference* and Alan Tansman’s essay “The Beauty of Violence: Yasuda Yojūrō’s “Japanese Bridges” included in his *Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*. These works can be regarded as representative studies on the Japanese Romantics and Yasuda Yojūrō in English literature. If my treatment seems rather critical, it is solely due to the polemical nature of the subject.

Equivocity of Difference: Kevin Michael Doak’s Interpretation of Yasuda Yojūrō

A good example for the elusive nature of Yasuda’s writing and the difficulty in pinning it down is provided by Kevin Michael Doak’s *Dreams of Difference*, one of the most comprehensive studies on the Japanese Romantics in both English and Japanese literature. Doak describes the Romantic movement as a critical response to Japanese modernity since the Meiji Restoration. His basic thesis is that Japanese Romantics and Yasuda in particular pursued cultural identity of Japan and “difference” from the homogenizing power of modernity that is represented by the “West.”³⁴ He, too, subscribes to the notion that Yasuda advocated “ethnic nationalism” (*minzoku shugi*) as opposed to “official state nationalism” (*kokka shugi*).³⁵

³⁴ Kevin Michael Doak, *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity* (Los Angeles and Berkley: University of California Press, 1994).

³⁵ For a thorough criticism of Doak’s notion of prewar Japan as ethnic nationalism, see Naoki Sakai, “Imperial Nationalism and the Comparative Perspective” in *positions: east asia cultures critique* (17:1), 181-94.

Perhaps because of the nature of the topic, the story he narrates on the Japanese Romantics and Yasuda Yojūrō is often quite equivocal and even contradictory, though comprehensive and informative. What Doak means by “difference,” however, is not self-evident. He does not say that the writers were cultural essentialists. “The Japanese romantics,” Doak says, “made clear... the artificial nature of “ethnicity” or “culture” in modern Japan and, hence, the need to consciously produce within the context of the modern world what will appear as native, traditional, and pure.”³⁶ In addition, he points out that, “as inhabitants of a modern world, they had much more in common with their contemporaries in Europe and America than with their own premodern ancestors.”³⁷ Such a split situation would be prone to an ironic consciousness. Doak describes Yasuda’s take on Romantic irony as follows:

In a definite move, Yasuda ultimately sought to displace irony from the German romantics and their search for cultural relativity in Europe to a nativist context that questioned the applicability of European norms of social organization to Japan. (4)

This remark is deeply equivocal, because it remains unclear whether or not Yasuda applied Romantic irony as a foreign concept to the native context, and therefore rejected the nativist premise. Or, on the contrary, is he saying that Yasuda tried and even managed to assimilate irony into a native principle? In any case, it is not so obvious if Yasuda himself was making such a distinction between native vs. foreign. If the “pure poet” Hölderlin suffered from schizophrenia, Yasuda argued, it was because he could not bear “the disintegration that arises from within the absolute.” (quoted in Doak, 4)³⁸ Here, Yasuda clearly recognized that “irony” as the consciousness of this

³⁶ Doak, *Dreams of Difference*, xviii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xix.

³⁸ In terms of German Romanticism, Doak mentions a post-structuralist analysis in Philip Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Literary Absolute*, but he makes a serious misunderstanding. Quoting them, Doak says: “Indeed, the focus on the self, its certainty and effects, is a central theme in Romanticism and has been traced to the German romantics’ attempt to rethink Descartes’s legacy to Western thought that “it is in reconstructing the world... that the subject constitutes itself *as* subject.””

disintegration is constitutive of “modernity” per se. Doak fails to provide any adequate evidence that Yasuda felt the need to distinguish Europe and Japan in this regard. In fact, Yasuda wrote numerous pieces on themes in European literature and cultural history, such as Hölderlin, Napoleon, and Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*. In these essays, Yasuda himself does not especially stick to the dichotomy between Europe and Japan nor try to differentiate Japan from the so-called “West,” as I show in the following chapters. If this is the case, he was fully aware and acknowledged that the fate of European modernity as he described it is his own. It would then become all the more difficult to claim that Yasuda’s project lay in creating “difference.”

In the meantime, Doak argues that Yasuda moved to pursue “universality” in the late 1930s. Specifically, Doak points out that Yasuda regarded the Hakuho-Tenpyo period (645-794) as a “cosmopolitan” (*sekai teki*) era. I also agree that Yasuda was concerned about “universality,” but it is misleading to say that Yasuda looked for universality only in Japanese tradition, and that he turned to the tradition because he had “elucidated the failure of Napoleon to resurrect a concept of universality that would undergird differences among various cultures in modernity.”⁽⁹⁾ Yet, one has to take seriously the fact that Yasuda felt sympathy with the Napoleon’s tragic and unsuccessful attempt at empire-building. It would make more sense to understand that

(Doak, *Dreams of Difference*, xxxiii) It is true that the romantics tried to “rethink” the Cartesian legacy. But what does it mean? In this context, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are emphasizing how *different* the romantic subject is from the Cartesian subject that would be transparent to itself. According to them, the romantic subject, in reconstructing the world “from a primitive chaos,” produces a work out of it—namely, “fragments”—thereby forming itself as an artistic creator. “This creator, however,” they continue, “is not the subject of a *cogito*, either in the sense of immediate self-knowledge or in that of the positing of a substance of the subject.” (Philip Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester [Albany: SUNY Press, 1988], 52) A few lines later, Doak reveals his complete misunderstanding. Quoting another scholar, he continues as follows: “The romantics saw identity not as the product of a system of signification in which the subject is always decentered but as the moment when “the subject appears fully present to itself in a signified without a signifier, a represented without means of representation” [quoted from Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*].” Apparently, Doak cites these different authors without understanding that they are making the very opposite arguments. This would suggest, at the very least, that Doak’s notion of German Romanticism is rather confused and problematic.

Yasuda is performatively suggesting that the contemporary Japan should not only learn the lesson, but assume the mission. In fact, as I show later, Yasuda at the time of the Sino-Japanese War believed that Japanese empire represented a “world historical” universality.

Because Doak does not take the context of Yasuda’s imperialism into consideration, he makes rather tenuous interpretations. He claims that Yasuda made another turn from this universal Japan, quoting Yasuda’s abstruse passage written in 1940: “The Basis of the Japan Romantic School has become a realism called Japan as irony, or the irony of a free Japan that has simultaneously maintained destruction and construction.” (quoted in Doak, 19) He maintains that Yasuda came to speak of “Japan as irony,” because he failed to “articulate a coherent basis for a universal value in Japanese traditions.” (14) While there are some commentators who point to a certain change in Yasuda, associating it with his experience in the Chinese Continent in 1938, his interpretation is not very convincing. He discusses Yasuda’s essay on *Sorrows of Young Werther* as a key text for Yasuda’s turn, but the text hardly provides an evidence for it, because there Yasuda just describes the conflict between romantic love and the institution of marriage in the novel as “shameful contradictions” (quoted in Doak, 16) of modernity itself. This is none other than a continuation of the same argument in his early essays. Apart from whether or not there was certain change in Yasuda, it is important to understand that universal Japan for Yasuda could be, and was, “Japan as irony” simultaneously. As literary critic Oketani Hideaki suggests, Yasuda from early on recognized that there is a constitutive gap between the ideal and the real, the universal and the particular, in a state system.³⁹ The ideal universality of a

³⁹ Oketani argues that this “realism called Japan as irony” does not represent change in Yasuda’s thought, by convincingly tracing his conception of irony as a gap between the ideal and the real to one of his earliest essays on the establishment of the ancient state and *kotodama* (spirit of words) in 1930: Yasuda Yojūrō, ““Kōkyō kōrai no uta” ni okeru kotodama ni tsuite no kōsatsu: jōdai kokka seiritsu nit suite no autorain” [An observation on the spirits of words in “Poem wishing Godspeed to the

state is always ironic in relation to its infrastructure. While he thus incorporated the materialist view of history in his theory of irony, he did not reject the dimension of the ideal—as expressed in the idea of *kotodama*—as mere ideology. Hence, even if he

Ambassador to China” by Yamanoue Okura: an outline for the establishment of the ancient state] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 40 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1989), 62-72; originally published for the May 1930 issue of *Shisō* under the name of Yuhara Fuyumi. In this essay, Yasuda employs the materialist view of history, developed by Engels’ *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, to discuss Yamanoue Okura’s notion of *kotodama* in his famous “Poem wishing Godspeed to the Ambassador to China” included in *Man’yōshū*, Book five, 894. Here is the poem: “It has been recounted/ down through time/ since the age of the gods:/ that this land of Yamato/ is a land of imperial deities’/ stern majesty,/ a land blessed by the spirit of words./ Every man of the present/ sees it before his eyes/ and knows it to be true.” (*The Ten Thousand Leaves*, vol. 1, trans. Ian Hideo Levy [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981], 390.) Yasuda says that *kotodama* is a “mysterious faith” in the “absolute will” as a productive power, which the “emperor” represents on the earth. He locates this notion in the historical context of the Hakuho-Tenpyō period (645-794). He interprets it as reflecting the establishment of the state power and the “notion of sacred emperor” (*teiō shinsei kannen*). In the meantime, since the state power was established on the basis of class division, Yasuda argues that “class struggle” was intensified at the Tenpyō era and expressed in the form of “Romantic revolt” (*roman teki hankō*). Interestingly, Okura is also known for his “Dialog of the Destitute” (*bingu [or hinkyū] mondō ka*). That is to say, the same poet celebrated Yamato as “the land of imperial deities’ stern majesty,” while pointing to its contradictions. Yasuda holds “*Man’yo*, they say, is a collection of voices that mourn the disappearing *kotodama*.” While Yasuda obviously presupposes the Marxist theory, what gives a twist to his reading is his understanding of the relationship between the infrastructure and the ideological dimension. Oketani claims that Yasuda understands Okura’s ambivalence through Fujitani Mitsue’s hermeneutics of *tōgo*. In other words, Oketani’s interpretation suggests that for Yasuda, Yamato as “the land of imperial deities’ stern majesty” implies a certain irony, which anticipates later “Japan as irony.” See Oketani Hideaki, *Shōwa seishin shi*, 190-223. What is equally interesting from our perspective is the fact that Yasuda was concerned about this poet Okura rather than others. Okura’s life was deeply involved in the international context of the ancient East Asia: his poem on *kotodama*, dedicated to the ambassador to Tang China, contrasts Yamato and Tang; he himself had been delegated there as a diplomat from 702 until 707; in fact, his poems show his familiarity with Chinese texts including Buddhism and Confucianism; moreover, in the postwar, scholars such as Nakanishi Susumu advocated a theory that Okura was a native Korean whose family exiled from Baekche to Yamato when the country was ruined by Tang and Shilla. See Nakanishi Susumu, “Sōkoku to meimō—Yamanoue no Okura wo megutte” [Conflicts and vacillations—concerning Yamanoue no Okura] in *Nakanishi Susumu Man’yō ronshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1996), 439-455; for a summary of the subsequent debate, especially about Okura’s reception of Buddhism, as well as an examination of existing translations of *Man’yōshū*, see Roy Andrew Miller, “Yamanoue Okura, A Korean Poet in Eighth Century Japan,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 104, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1984), 703-726. Nakanishi argues that what is characteristic about Okura’s poetics lied in vacillation (*yure*) between two conflicting theses, such as Buddhism as the universal principle for salvation and the pains and sorrows of human reality. However, these theses, Nakanishi claims, remained a mere juxtaposition (*taichi*) because they were not “dialectically” elevated to “antitheses.” Although Nakanishi does not spell it out, this interpretation seems to be closely related to the irony that it was this native Korean who spoke of *kotodama*. Interestingly enough, one of the scholars who immediately supported Nakanishi’s theory of Okura as a native Korean was Takagi Ichinosuke, who, as a professor of the Keijō Imperial University, had hosted Yasuda Yojūrō in Keijō in 1938. In any event, judging from Yasuda’s other essays on Korea, it is almost certain that when he discussed Okura in this early essay, Yasuda had a view that the ancient state was a multiethnic empire just like the contemporary Japan.

speaks of “realism,” it does not contradict his notion of irony, as Doak says. Nor does it immediately mean that he abandoned universalism. Due to the lack in this understanding, Doak criticizes Yasuda’s “change” in the following way:

Far from imagining a principle of difference that could distinguish Japan from the modern, Western nations, what he finally achieved was a form of intellectual stagnation that greatly resembled more familiar Western notions of nationalism. (20)

Although it is quite dubious to suggest that Yasuda tried to distinguish Japan from the “West” in this way, it is true that Yasuda was a nationalist. The crucial question here, however, is what type of nationalism he advocated. Although Doak writes as if Yasuda turned from universalism to ethnic nationalism, Yasuda, I argue, remained committed to imperial nationalism based on universal world history.

Thus, it turns out that, in spite of his intention, Doak is unable to show “difference,” constantly cancelling out what he is saying. He oscillates between attributing cultural difference to Yasuda and admitting homogeneity with the “West.” Doak seems to be trapped by the ironic gaps between Japan vs. West, universal vs. particular, difference vs. identity. As Yasuda was fully aware, these gaps are far from simple dichotomies, but ambiguous relationships. While Doak’s oscillation surely reflects such ambiguity itself, one might be tempted to say that it also derives from projection of Doak’s own “dreams of difference” and its frustration.

Yasuda Yojūrō’s “Japanese Bridges” and the Politics of Literature: A Critical Commentary on Alan Tansman’s Reading

A translator of Yasuda’s masterpiece, “Japanese Bridges,” Alan Tansman provides a close reading of this seemingly apolitical text as a “fascist aesthetic.” I will extensively comment on this piece, not only because his dense essay is one of the most recent monographs on Yasuda, but because it displays in a very paradigmatic manner

nearly all the issues I would like to address. The points I am going to make here will form a basis for my reading of Yasuda's writings in the next chapters.

Like previous commentators, Alan Tansman, too, discusses Yasuda in terms of aesthetic politics that pursued cultural authenticity in face of malaise of modernity.

But what is it that makes his politics a specifically *fascist* aesthetics?

Yasuda thereby offered a cure to individuals exhausted by the wounds of modernity (ironically through the piercing of his poetic arrow)—by the loss of cultural identity; alienation from native traditions; and feelings of inauthenticity, isolation, and loneliness. If fascism attempted to resolve these conditions through a politics of action, it is appropriate to use the term *fascist* in describing Yasuda. Fascism was Yasuda's "bridge," so to speak, between politics and aesthetics. Yasuda evoked fascist moments that transcended reason and made sacrifice of individuality to a higher cause seem attractive.⁴⁰

Even though Yasuda did not recommend direct action, his rhetoric, Tansman emphasizes, not only has a radical quality that nullifies the distinction between text and action, aesthetics and politics, but in fact endorses "violence." Yasuda would "bridge" the gap through *kotodama* or the magical power of words. Therefore, Tansman focuses on the way in which Yasuda's rhetoric of "bridge" urges, interpellates and even conscripts the reader into violence. Tansman critically analyzes Yasuda's etymological word play that lies at the heart of his essay on "Japanese bridges."

Before discussing Tansman's criticism, I would like to take a brief look at how Yasuda interprets the etymology and mythology of Japanese bridges. The Japanese term for "bridge," *hashi*, has many homonyms. For instance, "bridge," "chopstick," and "ladder" are all *hashi*. There was a long-standing debate about its etymology, Yasuda says, over whether it originally meant "end" (or "margin") of things or the

⁴⁰ Alan Tansman, "The Beauty of Violence: Yasuda Yojūrō's 'Japanese Bridges,'" in *Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), 53. Hereafter references are cited by page number in the text.

“boats used as intermediaries.” But that such overlapping of meanings in one name was no wonder, Yasuda states.

[I]t makes good sense to understand *hashi* as that which connects two things, allowing movement back and forth across a flat surface and also movement up and down. Moreover, it is not at all odd to think that the people of old abstracted these means of movement back and forth and that for them *hashi*, which were facilitators of movement, were at the same time at the ends of things.⁴¹

Yasuda further points to an important phenomenon in Japanese cultural history, that is, *ama no hashidate* or the Floating Bridge of Heaven. Significantly, he quotes Motoori Norinaga here: “In the age of the gods, there were bridges everywhere climbing to and descending from heaven.” Thus, *hashi* in such polysemy implies a movement of both “crossing and flying.” “[T]he end of things immediately meant flight,” which attests to *kotodama* or “the magical power of words.”⁴²

⁴¹ Yasuda Yojūrō, “Japanese Bridges,” trans. Alan Tansman, *Journal of Japanese Studies* (34:2, 2008), 265. The first version of the essay was written in 1936. Tansman’s translation is based on the second version published in 1939. 「日本の言葉で、はしは端末を意味するか、仲介としての専ら舟を意味するかは、かつてから何人かの人々の間で云い争われてきた主題であった。橋も箸も梯も、すべてははしであるが、二つのものを結びつけるはしを平面の上のゆききとし、又同時に上下のゆききとすることはさして妥協の説ではない。しかもゆきき的手段となれば、それらを抽象してもものの終末にすではしのてだてを考えることも何もいぢけた中間説ではない」 Yasuda Yojūrō, “Nihon no hashi,” in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 164-5.

⁴² Such etymological thinking does not seem to be unique to “Japanese cultural tradition.” One might be tempted to associate Yasuda’s essay with Heidegger’s reflection on “bridge.” In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger talks about the bridge: “To be sure, the bridge is a thing of its own kind; for it gathers the fourfold in *such* a way that it allows a *site* for it. But only something *that is itself a location* (*Ort*) can make space for a site....A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary (*Grenze*), Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing* (*Wesen*).” (Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975], 154.) In this way, one can draw several important connections between them: both Yasuda and Heidegger derive their insight into the bridge from a reflection of language; describe the bridge as a place that allows the humans and gods, the earth and the heaven to gather; and understand that the essence or identity of things manifests itself at this marginal, liminal and peripheral place of boundary. Interestingly enough, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha begins his *Location of Culture* with this very epigraph from Heidegger. That is to say, his postcolonial thinking of hybridity and heterogeneity was inspired by Heidegger’s notion of “boundary” as “that from which something begins its presencing.” See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), 1, 7. In this way, *hashi* would serve as a figure for ambiguity inherent in any form of identity. At the same time, however, what Yasuda’s prewar writings show is that such a sense of heterogeneity inscribed in the trope of *hashi* constituted very subjective

Tansman critically examines this mythological reflection. Tansman describes Yasuda's operation as emphasizing the "orality" of *hashi*, making his prose into hypnotic incantation, and invalidating the distinctions of meanings. It is precisely here that he detects what he calls a "fascist moment." Moreover, it even ignores the historical difference of the referents designated by the word.

This one sound, *hashi*, connotes and contains all Japanese tradition. *Hashi* no longer denotes a specific meaning but functions as a sound, whose pulse revives the power of *kotodama*. *Hashi* as it appeared in the love poetry of the Heian court becomes coeval with the *hashi* of Kamakura warfare or the *hashi* of Edo love suicides. *Hashi* disrupts history and yokes it to a timeless musical moment—a fascist moment. (66)

In short, Tansman regards Yasuda's rhetoric as "violent," because the "musical" quality of his prose paralyzes rational thinking by undermining the semantic and historical differences.

Based on this reading, Tansman characterizes Yasuda's writing as a whole in terms of *hashi*. "Bridges, in their capacity to embody contradictions, possess for Yasuda the qualities of literature itself." (71) Literature as a bridge, or better yet, bridges as literature—this happy trope of a trope would be true for almost any literature deserving its name. But Tansman says this from a critical reason. He continues: "Stationary structures that allow movement, in Yasuda's imagination they 'fly' and 'float.' They are at once stationary and kinetic, permitting movement but leading nowhere, reaching into prehistory but also leading to a limitless future." (71) He further paraphrases this "nowhere" as "[n]owhere of violence." (88) Thus, in the final analysis, Tansman thinks of Yasuda's "bridge-literature" negatively for the reason that it urges "violence."

formations of Japanese empire. Therefore, my essay sees in this internally contested nature of the subjective formations more of a trope for imperial identity than postcolonial potentials.

Unfortunately, however, his arguments are not very convincing for a number of reasons. First, his criticism seems to miss what is at stake in Yasuda's literary writing. I would argue that Yasuda's rhetoric of *hashi* is not so much concerned about musicality per se as textuality. Second, his conception of "fascism" is rather vague in the first place. If one follows his definition of "fascist moment," i.e., the rhetoric nullifying specific differences, rational and real, of meanings and referents, any poetic or "musical" language would be "fascistic." This would not tell much about what makes Yasuda's politics specifically "violent," or even "fascistic." To be sure, Tansman makes a series of distinctions such as rational vs. emotional, and so on, in order to characterize the so-called "fascist moments," but these binary oppositions seem to derive from quite simplistic and old-fashioned conceptions of Romanticism. Third, these issues both cause and are caused by his misreading of Yasuda's texts. What is especially revealing is Tansman's treatment of Yasuda's depiction of women, which is one of the important characteristics of his writings. Because of his own rigid conception of gender, Tansman fails to grasp Yasuda's peculiar "feminism." At worst, Tansman even distorts Yasuda's text, as I show in detail. I am not claiming that Yasuda was a genuine feminist, but it is important to take into account the fact that he was not only different from, but critical of, the dominant gender ideology. Otherwise, it would be impossible to appropriately comprehend the implications of his seemingly non-masculinist gender politics, which I claim served for the empire in a paradoxical way. In the following, I will discuss these problems respectively.

a) Textuality of *Hashi*

First of all, however irrational and forced Yasuda's rhetoric may seem, it is far from mere word play based on the writer's unbridled imagination. It is true that he brackets both the meanings and the referents. Yet, does that necessarily mean that he

intended to exclusively focus on “orality”? Is Tansman saying that when a word is deprived of its meaning, the only thing left is its “sound”? Here, is he not caught up in a simpleminded view of a word as a combination of sound and meaning? There is no reason, however, to ignore or eliminate the aspect of writing. In his oblivion of textual inscription, Tansman himself reveals a symptom of what Jacques Derrida called “phonocentrism.” In contrast, through a sort of literary reduction of the signified of the sign *hashi*, Yasuda actually brings attention to the aspect of signifier, or better yet, *writing*. In other words, what Tansman fails to see is that Yasuda’s writing is first and foremost concerned about *textuality* that is open to “dissemination.”⁴³ Specifically, when Yasuda talks about the etymology of *hashi* and enumerates its different meanings such as “bridge,” “end,” “boat,” “ladder,” “chopsticks,” and so forth, he is showing that a signifier—“*hashi*”—signifies not only one fixed signified, e.g., “bridge, but also another signified, “ladder,” for instance, and how the latter itself then turns into another signifier, “*hashigo*.” Yasuda was fully aware that this play of difference is ineradicable from the movement of textuality. This move on the part of Yasuda is in complete agreement with German Romanticism, which, as the recent studies show, discovered or indented the modern notion of “literature” and literary texts. In the next chapter, I will show how Yasuda developed his notion of textuality and Romantic irony through his reading of Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Schlegel in particular.

In the third chapter, however, I will argue that Yasuda Yojūrō was actively involved in Japanese empire through his notion of “world history” and Romantic irony.

⁴³ See Derrida’s locus classicus: “Yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general.... *There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*].” (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997], 158.)

To this end, I will evoke the figure of *hashi* in its polysemic moments—“bridge,” “ladder,” “boat,” “end”—to illuminate Yasuda’s literary imperialism. In other words, I will show how this multiple *hashi* is a suitable trope for the ironic movement that constitutes the imperial formation by deconstructing ethnic identities. Significantly enough, Tansman, too, cites Yasuda’s involvement in Japan’s expansion to Manchuria, and even describes it in terms of his desire for “bridge.”

The clearing of that actual space in the expanding empire was first prepared for by the clearing of imaginative space. The “real bridges” of Manchuria, the region’s actual culture, needed to be replaced by “bridges of the imagination”—Japanese bridges.(100).

This is an important point, and I also claim that Yasuda’s imperialism was motivated by the *hashi* trope. However, he seems to use it as a simple, external metaphor, i.e., “bridge,” that is meant to represent a different thing, that is, Yasuda’s imperialism. Instead I would like to pay attention to the polysemic and even conflictive moments that are gathered in the term *hashi* and describe the internally articulated structure and movement of Yasuda’s imperial project. I would also like to point out that Tansman still makes a rather simple-minded contrast between “imaginative” (metaphorical) and “real” bridges. This distinction however, becomes tenuous if one recognizes that Yasuda’s very enterprise was prefigured and internally determined by these multiple moments.

Moreover, it is also questionable whether Yasuda’s bridge literature tried to replace foreign (Asian) bridges by “authentic” Japanese bridges. One important case is the connection between the *hashi* figure and the colonial relationship. That is to say, what is at stake is how to understand what I call Yasuda’s Romantic colonialism. Tansman quotes Yasuda’s passage in which he mentions his experience with a native Korean during his first trip to the Peninsula in 1932: “When I came to a place where

there was no bridge, a local person who happened to be there insisted on taking me across on his shoulders.”(101) Here is Tansman’s interpretation of this encounter:

If these fascist moments were to embark Japanese on a journey to a place where they might feel the beauty of stillness, then the conveyance to that place—the bridge—would be furnished by the colonized themselves, a people Yasuda characterized as happily stuck before the rise and fall of modernity.
(101)

This reading does capture the moment of *hashi* as the intermediary, and I find important his point that the colonized was made to serve as such in this instance. Yet, in part because of his traditional notion of Romanticism, Tansman cannot fully recognize the complexity of this encounter. Specifically, he does not seem to be aware of the possibility that if a colonial figure can become a “bridge,” it inevitably contaminates the authenticity of “Japanese” bridges. As my reading of Yasuda’s journey through the Korean Peninsula will show, *hashi* is far from a static place of “timeless beauty,” but rather a heterogeneous site of intercourse and encounter in which the colonized “Koreans” were mobilized to the movement of the “world historical” empire as its subjects, which, in turn, affected and transformed the “Japanese” identity itself. In other words, *hashi* is precisely something that hybridizes “cultures.”

b) Implications of the Recent Studies of German Romanticism

Second, if Tansman missed Yasuda’s textual dimension, it is also caused by the fact that Tansman’s view of German Romanticism is based on its outdated notions that have been amply questioned in the recent studies. Unfortunately, this inadequacy in the understanding of the Romanticism notion is persistent in the studies of Japanese Romanticism both in Japan and the United States. Here I concentrate on Tansman, first, because his essay shows the problem most consistently, and, second, because his

interpretation of Yasuda as fascist aesthetics is largely a reworking of this traditional view.

Tansman introduces a series of binary oppositions regarding Romanticism. “The beginnings of Romanticism in the West,” he says, “can be traced to the eighteenth-century German-speaking countries whose sense of cultural inferiority vis-à-vis French military strength, social organization, and arts resulted in a period of cultural imitation that wounded national pride.” (55) Referring to Isaiah Berlin’s once influential work, he states: “By claiming that cultural values are not universal, the German romantics rejected the French Enlightenment assumption that all values are immutable and timeless, insisting instead on the uniqueness of national cultures.” (304) Furthermore, he brings in another dichotomy, that is, the one between the “West” and the “non-West”: “Japanese resentment toward the West was akin to German resentment toward France.” (55) He calls this relationship “Yasuda’s burned bridge to the West.” It is surprising that Tansman, even today, uses the term “West” in a totally unmarked way. That is to say, he suggests that there is such an entity, and in so doing reinforces the dichotomy between the “West” and the “Rest,” even as he talks about a cultural divide between France and Germany. When one sees such problematic operation repeated, one feels the strong need to reaffirm the insight that such an entity as the “West” is always constructed by a hierarchical and exclusionary operation.⁴⁴ Even apart from that, all this characterization clearly suggests that Japanese Romantics would be more inferior to, more reactionary, and more violent than its German counterpart.

⁴⁴ Naoki Sakai calls this process of identification the “schema of co-figuration,” and analyzes how such discursive operation constructs the idea, or better yet fantasy, of the “West” by negating and reifying its other. See Naoki Sakai, “The Problem of “Japanese Thought”: The Formation of “Japan” and the Schema of Cofiguration,” in *Translation and Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 40-71; “Dislocation of the West and the Status of the Humanities,” in Naoki Sakai and Yukiko Hanawa ed. *Traces* vol. 1 (Ithaca: Traces Inc., 2001), 71-94.

In this way, Tansman reiterates the traditional paradigm that tended to describe German Romanticism as a reaction to modernity and the Enlightenment and as a yearning for the historical past of the nation. This view was based upon a series of binary oppositions between modernity vs. tradition, reason vs. emotion, and liberalism vs. communitarianism, and universalism vs. particularism, which were often made to overlap with the geopolitical conflict between France vs. Germany. Under this scheme, German Romanticism was sometimes even associated with Nazism as its precursor. Tansman, too, makes virtually little distinction between Romanticism and fascism.

However, the recent developments in the field in the last thirty years have put into question these old-fashioned preconceptions about *Frühromantik* or early German Romantics, revealing surprisingly “modern” or even “postmodern” aspects of this literary movement. First and foremost, post-structuralist literary theorists such as Philip Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, Paul de Man and Winfried Menninghaus argue that the Romantics of Jena in the 1790s created the idea of “literature” as a genre based on poietic self-production of subject, thereby opening up a contemporary notion of textuality in its temporal and fragmentary nature.⁴⁵ Menninghaus even claimed that the Romantic theory of “absolute self-reflection” as a process of “infinite doubling” in signification deconstructed “metaphysics of presence,” thereby anticipating what Derrida called “*différance*.”⁴⁶ Therefore, it follows that Romantic writers never reified cultural essence or tradition of a nation, but were fully aware that subjective identity is always already constructed and deconstructed in writing.

⁴⁵ See Philip Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988); Winfried Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung: Die frühromantische Grundlegung der Kunsttheorie im Begriff absoluter Selbstreflexion* (infinite doubling: the early Romantic foundation of theory of art in the concept of absolute self-reflection) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987); Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 187-228 and “The Concept of Irony,” in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 163-184.

⁴⁶ See Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung*, 115-131.

In contrast to this postmodern interpretation, German philosopher Manfred Frank claims that the Romantics did reject the first principle, i.e., the unconditioned absolute, but this anti-foundationalism did not abandon the normative idea as a goal for “infinite approximation.”⁴⁷ Also, in terms of political philosophy, Frederick Beiser demonstrates how Romantic writers such as Schlegel embraced the French Revolution and republicanism, trying to reconcile reason, individual freedom, and progress with the idea of community.⁴⁸ Although these scholars differ in their take or emphasis on literature vs. philosophy and modernity vs. postmodernity, all these discussions effectively undermine the above mentioned binary oppositions concerning German Romanticism.

These research trends will help deconstruct the established image of Japanese Romanticism as reactionary, cultural particularism. The modern or postmodern nature of Romantic literature can be said to be condensed in the notion of “Romantic irony,” and it is Yasuda’s ironic writing that prevents him from being cultural essentialist or ethnic nationalist.

At the same time, however, I will argue, in the next chapters, that the deconstructive moment in his ironic practice was the very element that led him to be deeply involved in Japan’s colonial empire. Moreover, I will show that, contrary to the traditional notion that Romanticism was steeped in the heritage of particular national culture, Yasuda advocated a certain kind of universalism through the idea of “world history.”

In this connection, I would like to point out that there is another growing field in the studies of German Romanticism that addresses the Romantic conception of the

⁴⁷ See Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ See Frederick Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992); *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003).

“Orient.” Since Edward Said’s path-breaking *Orientalism* (1978), the representation of the “Orient” in the “Western” discourse has been vigorously discussed as a question of power and knowledge production in various fields of the humanities. But Said’s own treatment of German Orientalism remained minimal. “What German Oriental scholarship did,” Said claimed, “was to refine and elaborate techniques whose application was to texts, myths, ideas, and languages almost literally gathered from the Orient by imperial Britain and France.”⁴⁹ The fact that Germany lagged behind Britain and France in terms of colonial enterprise makes it difficult for him to argue for the complicity between knowledge and power in the German case. However, scholars such as Nicholas Germana, Susanne Zantop, Todd Kontje and others have filled this gap, arguing that many German writers and thinkers since Johann Gottfried Herder were deeply interested in the nascent object of study called the “Orient” and tended to identify themselves with this “victim” of the Western European imperialism.⁵⁰ In fact, Schlegel, a serious student of Sanskrit and the author of *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder* (On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians), insisted on the Indian origin of the Germans. Likewise, his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel maintained “Germany must be considered the Orient of Europe.”⁵¹ Significantly, Germana describes this tendency as “self-Othering” of German Orientalism. This remarkable point effectively undermines the boundary between the “West” and the “non-West” in terms of Romanticism. What is also important in our context is that Friedrich Schlegel tried to ground this conviction by narrating a world history based on his migration theory in his *Lectures on Universal History*.⁵² To be sure, there are

⁴⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 19.

⁵⁰ For good surveys of the field, see Nicholas A. Germana, “Self-Othering in German Orientalism. The Case of Friedrich Schlegel” in *The Comparatist*, vol. 34 (May 2010), 80-94; *The Orient of Europe: The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 1-17.

⁵¹ Quoted in Germana, “Self-Othering,” 84.

⁵² See Germana, *The Orient of Europe*. 137-42.

several historical and geopolitical differences between Japanese and German Romanticisms.⁵³ However, the fact that both envisioned the idea of “world history” in their own ways shows that the Romantic mode of thinking was never intrinsically cultural essentialist or ethnic nationalist, but was profoundly concerned about the global dimension of the world and history.

c) Politics of Yasuda’s Ambiguous “Feminism”

As a result of his persistent reliance on binary oppositions, Tansman often misses the subtle ambiguities of Yasuda’s literary politics. The shortcomings become most visible in Tansman’s misinterpretations of Yasuda’s take on two female figures: 1) a mother in the medieval Japan who commissioned the rebuilding of a bridge in memoriam of her lost son Kinsuke, and 2) Kawahara Misako, a Meiji educator who went to the Chinese Continent and was involved in a secret intelligence activity at the Russo-Japanese War. Yasuda is known for his penchant for “femininity,” which belongs to the genealogy of *kokugaku* or the National Studies. It is also noteworthy that he was also informed by the materialist view of history especially in terms of women’s history.⁵⁴ His depictions in both cases show remarkable ambivalence,

⁵³ Whereas the early German Romantics were witnessing the emergence of the modern nation-state system at the time of the French Revolution, the writers of Japanese romantics in the 1930s began their career in a historical conjuncture marked by the Russian Revolution, the general crisis of capitalism and the rise of fascist movements. Above all else, Yasuda’s Japan was a colonial empire, while the Germans in the early eighteenth century suffered from the intervention by France and the disunion of their nation.

⁵⁴ In addition to the tradition of the National Studies, Yasuda presupposed a view of women’s history based on the materialist view of history as developed in Friedrich Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). While he never identified himself as a Marxist, he did not deny certain theoretical validity of it either. He referred to Engels’ work in a number of his essays. Especially, in a 1939 essay on Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*, he provides most extensive comments on Engels in the context of discussing the ironic or aporetic relationship between the modern notion of romantic love and the institution of marriage, as well as hypocritical practices of actual marriage in both Catholic and Protestant countries. Yasuda, however, is skeptical of Engels who still stuck to the idea of true marriage based on romantic love for the proletariat. Instead, he finds Nietzsche at least more consistent, because he claimed that marriage as an institution should be abolished. See Yasuda Yojūrō, “Weruteru ha naze shinda ka” [Why did Werther die?], in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 287-353, esp. 341-51.

sometimes resisting a simple-minded ideological critique, and sometimes disrupting traditional gender norms for women.

1) A Mother Figure and the Politics of Mourning

For Tansman, the most revealing example of the “fascist aesthetics” is Yasuda’s reading of a brief epitaph at the Saidan-bashi Bridge in Nagoya. But it is precisely here that Tansman’s interpretation stumbles. This inscription from the late sixteenth century was written in both Japanese and Chinese by a woman who commissioned the (re)building of the bridge on the thirty third anniversary (*sanjū san kai ki*) of the death of her son. Quoting the Japanese text, Yasuda describes it as “the single most superlative bridge literature in Japan.”⁵⁵ Here is the epitaph by Tansman’s translation:

“On the eighteenth day of the second month of Tenshō 18 [1591], the honorable Kinsuke, a child of 18, died in battle at Odawara. For this reason, and from an excess of unbearable sorrow, I now build this bridge. This mother’s body dissolves into tears. May he attain Buddhahood. The generations to come and those after them who see this document shall chant [his posthumous] name Itsukanseishun to the Buddha. On the thirtieth [sic] memorial of his death.”⁵⁶

Tansman further quotes Yasuda’s following commentary on this bridge literature.

In the feudal wartime era, the wives of samurai, out of their sense of duty, hid their tears as they killed the beloved children of their own flesh, and without blinking proudly celebrated their husbands’ departure to die in battle, and they saw this as beautiful; these woman were imbued with deep beauty and sorrow. Stuffed with the atmosphere of the age, the inscription is intensely moving. *But hers was a self-sacrifice imbued with the awareness of the inevitability of defeat*: it shows neither resistance nor protest, nor a vain revolt, nor the signs of a call to the masses for individual liberation. (91) (My emphasis.)

⁵⁵ “I am not merely saying that this woman’s voice—which thought of those people’s journeys, as they went from this shore to that, and sang, out of sympathy, of the “excess of unbearable sorrow” from her eternal sorrow—is the single most superlative bridge literature in Japan, but that precisely this woman’s voice, this pure voice that thankfully continues to exist in this world, was something that expressed an ultimate wisdom with complete artlessness.” (Yasuda, “Japanese Bridges,” 292.)

⁵⁶ Ibid.

How then does Tansman interpret this passage? Here Tansman criticizes Yasuda, saying that he “hijacks” the mother’s grief and mourning. “Yasuda’s version of the fascist moment turns on this seductive ideology of self-sacrifice and its attendant sorrow.” (91)

I agree that the basic note of Yasuda’s quote shows a profound sense of resignation.⁵⁷ I would argue, however, that there is a considerable gap between the sense of resignation and celebration of “self-sacrifice.” Is Yasuda celebrating, promoting or demanding “self-sacrifice” here? Apparently Tansman’s reading is based on a literal straightforward reading of the text itself, because in his quote, it speaks of “self-sacrifice.”

This is not the case, however. Surprisingly enough, there is nothing in the original, whether in the first edition or the second, that would correspond to this passage containing the word “self-sacrifice,” which I italicized: “*But hers was a self-sacrifice imbued with the awareness of the inevitability of defeat.*”⁵⁸ In fact, Tansman does not include this passage in his translation of the whole essay published prior to his monograph. Therefore, he must be aware that it is his own insertion into the quote. In other words, he knowingly presents his own “paraphrase” as a quote. If this is the

⁵⁷ This is made explicit by the passage that Yasuda added in the revised 1939 version of “Japanese Bridges”: “From the most ancient times boys have had in their hearts the desire to lay their lives on the line. They have lived life as heartless Buddhist prayer, drawing on the ancient beginnings of life, for the sake, even, of nameless wars, dying even for that which was destined for defeat. Theirs has been the sorrowful strength of men coloring human history. And the woman’s heart was as it should be: wilting, shedding silent and hidden tears on the morning of her husband’s departure for battle. This extraordinarily gentle femininity was, in its gentleness, a woman’s power.” (Tansman’s translation in the “Beauty of Violence,” 91) Yet, it does not cancel the profound ambiguity included the preceding passage. For the difference between the first and second versions, see also Tansman’s endnote on the revision, Tansman, *Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, 301-2.

⁵⁸ Here is the Japanese original: 私はそういう時代の雰囲気の中かゆえに、この一つの短い銘文に激しく心うたれてならなかった。それは反抗でも抗議でも、さらに果無い反逆でも、まして又大仰に語られるべき個性解放の叫びの萌しでもない。(Yasuda, “Nihon no hashi,” 197)

case, one has to say that this is a rather disingenuous move in order to make his interpretation appear persuasive.

How different would the text read if this insertion were taken out? It is evident that Yasuda is making a sharp contrast between the inscription and its historical context. The first sentence in the quote indicates the general atmosphere of the medieval period in which it was considered a virtue for women to be proud of, and even celebrate, the sacrifice of their husbands and sons. Yasuda says “the inscription is intensely moving,” precisely because it does not follow such a moral; the mother publicly but humbly expresses her ever-lasting feeling of loss and mourning of her beloved child even after thirty three years. He is saying that in spite of, not because of, the general climate of self-sacrifice, the mother lamented the loss. If Yasuda adds that “it shows neither resistance nor protest...nor the signs of a call to the masses for individual liberation,” he is not recommending “self-sacrifice,” but merely rejecting ideological interpretation that would project modern value system onto what he calls the “pure voice” of the mother and appropriate it for one’s political purpose. In other words, this whole passage is rejecting both militarist and progressive appropriations of the epitaph. In fact, he emphasizes that the mother expressed “an emotion that completely transcended any demands from the power of others [*tariki*], an emotion that believed naturally in the function of literature.”⁵⁹

I am not trying to say that Yasuda was actually critical of the warrior culture of the medieval period and, by extension, the contemporary Japanese militarism. Nor am

⁵⁹ Yasuda, “Nihon no hashi,” 197. My translation. Here his use of *tariki* is quite unorthodox. In this connection, I would like to point out that it is Tansman’s misreading that Yasuda relied upon the Buddhist notion such as “*tariki*.” Tansman says that *tariki* “informs the entire essay. He [Yasuda] describes this concept as “the lack of an intense human will, born from Buddhism and the Oriental belief in salvation through reliance on other’s strength.”” (Tansman, “The Beauty of Violence,” 97) But Yasuda is actually negating such an ordinary notion: “[t]hat Buddhism, and the Oriental belief in salvation through the help of others, gives birth to a lack of an intense human will is a lie.” This is in fact his own translation! (Yasuda, “Japanese Bridges,” 291.) In this way, his reading and his translation of “Japanese Bridges” are sometimes at odds with each other.

I suggesting that the expression of profound grief is in and of itself essentially opposed or contradictory to self-sacrificial attitude. Yet, it is hardly deniable that these two feelings are at least contrary to each other. If this is the case, Yasuda's text is far from univocal, but involves essential tensions within it.

It is certainly possible and even necessary to argue that by stressing the purity of emotion and negating the political appropriation of such emotion, Yasuda's rhetoric is all the more effective in terms of presenting his own reading as authentic and thereby making the reader less cautious about his stakes behind such a move.

Undoubtedly, such insistence on feeling as politically indifferent or even anti-political can be a highly political posture.⁶⁰ In this regard, too, Yasuda was an heir to Motoori Norinaga who privileged "*mono no aware*," which was considered to be a feminine principle. Tomiko Yoda makes an important point on Norinaga:

Norinaga used the inferior status of the feminine to exorcize what he perceived to be the hypocrisy and insincerity of the moralizing and didactic approach to poetry. He insisted on considering the affective source of poetry not on the basis of what *ought* to be but of what *is*, however transgressive it may be for the dominant ethical codes of the society.⁶¹

She also argues that Norinaga, as well as his modern followers since the Meiji era, appropriated the negativity of the feminine in order to construct a national literature.

⁶⁰ Maruyama Masao once detected paradoxes in Norinaga's aesthetics. Norinaga politicized literature, while at the same time, "aestheticizing" (*bungaku-ka*) and de-politicizing politics. See Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, trans. Mikiso Hane (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974), 171. Relying on Carl Schmitt's *Political Romanticism*, Maruyama argued that Norinaga's aesthetic politics was quite "occasionalist," affiliating itself with contrary ideologies. While Norinaga recommended "absolute devotion" to the status quo from the standpoint of "nature as the invention of the Gods," he, just as Ogyū Sorai, paradoxically invited the logic of "*shutai teki saku*" (subjective invention, or "automatic invention" in the English translation) through this idea of "nature." The existing regime is legitimate only insofar as it is the invention of the Gods, which relativizes the grounds of power and makes them only temporary. This would undermine the legitimacy of the Tokugawa feudal regime in a dialectical fashion, paving the way for the specifically modern political order based on subjectivity. See Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 154-76 and 264-73.

⁶¹ Tomiko Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 35.

Generally speaking, Yasuda's insistence of the purity of emotion and femininity belonged to this tradition, and it is therefore necessary to be attentive to what kind of political effects his appeal to the figure of femininity produces. As far as Yasuda's particular passage above is concerned, however, the aspect of "transgressiveness" seems to be predominant, which makes his politics profoundly ambivalent. As Tansman claims, the second version with its added passage may imply that sacrifice at a battle is something inevitable and needs to be endured, which might have aroused the feeling of resignation in the reader. But it means that the ambivalence and gap between grief and self-sacrifice has become even deeper.

Here it is important to recognize that in order to promote "self-sacrifice," one needs something more than such ambiguous, passive acceptance of the loss; dying for the nation must be valorized as an honorable cause. In the context of the Yasukuni Shrine debate in Japan in the early 2000s, Takahashi Tetsuya analyzes how the Shrine functioned historically to honor the war dead in Japan's war efforts and colonial enterprise, and calls its psychological mechanism of self-sacrifice "emotional alchemy" that converts grief on the part of the bereaved into joy and honor, giving the loss the meaning as the death for the country and the Emperor.⁶² In contrast to such

⁶² Takahashi says: "If the emotions of the bereaved relatives were felt as simply human beings, it could only result in grief. However, the grief became converted into joy as a result of the state ceremony. From grief to joy, from unhappiness to happiness, in what was akin to an alchemist's trick, the bereaved relatives' emotions had been turned around 180 degrees." See Tetsuya Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai* [The Yasukuni problem] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2005), 43. See also its partial translation, Tetsuya Takahashi, "The National Politics of the Yasukuni Shrine," trans. Philip Seaton, in *Nationalisms in Japan*, ed. Naoko Shimazu (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), 171. At the center of this emotional alchemy was, and still is, the Yasukuni Shrine that worships the Emperor System through the ideology of the State Shinto and its apparatus. Since its foundation as Tokyo Shōkonsha in 1869, the Yasukuni Shrine has functioned to honor the fallen soldiers in Japan's continual war efforts as *eirei* (glorious spirits), and in so doing, it was supposed to provide the meaning of the lives and deaths for all the Japanese people—not only "the glorious dead of Yasukuni," but also the bereaved families called "the mothers of Yasukuni" and so on. Takahashi argues however, that this does not mean the Shrine was created to "mourn" the dead. Rather, it has been meant to promote the self-sacrificial mentality by expressing the gratitude and respect to the war dead on the one hand, and replacing and repressing grief at the loss and the work of mourning, on the other. Significantly, Takahashi discusses the mothers of Yasukuni as an example of "emotional alchemy." He mentions a roundtable discussion entitled "Tearful Meeting with Proud Mothers who Gave their Only Sons to the Nation" (June 1939 issue of the

emotional alchemy, which was predominant in the late 1930s, Yasuda is not trying to glorify the death of a medieval soldier nor is he negating or repressing the expression of the mother's grief. Above all else, her inscribed lament itself neither affirms nor negates self-sacrifice; it is solely dedicated to mourning her lost child. Such commemoration might contain in it a potential to resist mobilization to self-sacrifice, as Takahashi argues. At the very least, there would be no room for criticizing state violence in the first place, if one denies the significance of such mourning.

To be fair, what Tansman is trying to show is that Yasuda's politics lies precisely in "bridging" this very gap between sorrow and self-sacrifice. Nonetheless, that does not justify ignoring all the nuance and ambiguity of Yasuda's passage, reducing it to a monolithic ideology. In this sense, Tansman's interpretation is rather forced, and does injustice to Yasuda's text. Does this not contradict his own standpoint against "violence"?

In this context, I would like to take a brief look at a relatively recent interpretation of Yasuda Yojūrō by a Japanese critic Fukuda Kazuya, because it represents a polar opposite view to Alan Tansman's criticism. In *Nippon no kakyō* (Japan's homeland), Fukuda argues that Yasuda was a modernist writer, just like the French symboliste Stéphane Mallarmé, in the sense that he put into parenthesis referential reality and pursued autonomy and materiality of language. Therefore, Yasuda realized, Fukuda emphasizes, that so-called "*genjitsu*" or reality is something

magazine *Shufu no Tomo*), which Hashikawa Bunzō had taken up earlier in his essay, "The Establishment and Development of Yasukuni Thought" in *Chūōkōron*, October 1974. Takahashi suggests that Hashikawa overlooked the grief of the mothers when he interpreted their words as showing "absolutely no protest or [feminine] weakness (*memeshisa*)" (quoted in Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*, 24; "The National Politics of the Yasukuni Shrine," 166). This oversight was partly due to the mothers' own tendency. "What we see here," says Takahashi, "is that as soon as the grief is expressed, it is psychologically repressed and shut out; and although it is replaced by feelings of honour ('giving a son to the emperor' and 'being of use to the emperor'), at the very least we can detect the conflict in the bereaved families between grief and honour" (Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*, 35; "The National Politics of the Yasukuni Shrine," 174).

that is always already constructed by “*shukō*” or idea (design) prior to it. This is an important point which we must take note of. To be sure, Tansman too calls Yasuda a modernist, but he does not seem to make good use of this insight. In this respect, Fukuda is theoretically more sophisticated than Tansman. Taking up Yasuda’s 1942 *Manyōshū no seishin* (the spirit of *Manyōshū*) in particular, Fukuda even claims that it was meant to be a criticism against the contemporary “reality” of total war and mobilization. At the same time, “*Manyōshū no seishin*,” Fukuda argues, “shows how the critique of “reality” by symbolisme inevitably leads to “Japan.””⁶³ He calls this fictive construct the “illusory Japan” (*kyomō no nihon*). “The illusory Japan manifests itself as an unavoidable consequence for true symboliste, true modernism, and true literature.”⁶⁴ In other words, fascism as a technological movement for a fictive community is an offspring of modernism. One cannot avoid fascist desire, Fukuda insists, insofar as there is always anomie and social division. His reading strategy, however, is to completely remove political judgment on the basis of the idea of autonomy of art and literature. Referring to Yasuda’s purge in the postwar, he insists: “Would there be a crime for literature in the first place? Only ethics or politics in “reality” condemns a crime. And, if one talks about a crime of a writer, then literature is already defeated by “reality.” Precisely because the illusory Japan is a principle of criticism that guarantees freedom and open-mindedness of thinking, this “Japan” was put to death in the postwar.”⁶⁵

Fukuda would say that such comments are made in the spirit of literature, but in so doing, he knowingly undermines the separation he himself has just made between representation and the real politics. As abuse or misuse of irony, this shameless tactic appropriates liberty admitted to literature in modern society. Such

⁶³ Fukuda Kazuya, *Nippon no kakyō* [Japan’s homeland] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1993), 130.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 135-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

aestheticism is never critical or antagonistic to, but totally dependent upon and complicit with liberalism as the dominant ideology of modernity. Although he invokes the names of fascist writers and thinkers such as Ezra Pound and Martin Heidegger to present his own project as somewhat “dangerous,” the kind of criticism Fukuda is practicing poses no real threat or challenge to political reality and the status quo. Carl Schmitt’s criticism against Romanticism would never be truer for Fukuda. Ironically, however, he never understands that so-called “illusory Japan” actually integrated in it diverse, multi-ethnic populations. What Yasuda called “Japanese irony” or “Japan as irony” is that it was an empire. Yasuda clearly saw and experienced this “reality”—Yasuda says “passion for decadence” was their “idea,” while “Japanese irony” was “reality”—, Fukuda could never perceive it.

In this way, it is easy to see that his statements are diametrically opposed to Tansman’s political judgment on Yasuda. Simply put, Fukuda reduces politics into literature, whereas Tansman does literature into politics. I would argue that both sides miss the very ambiguity that characterizes Yasuda’s literary politics. Tansman and I would agree that Fukuda, along with Yasuda, needs to be criticized, but his mode of argument would not be effective in criticizing Fukuda’s kind of ideology because they presuppose more or less the same image of Yasuda—as ethnic nationalist and/or fascist—with just opposite evaluations on it. In fact, Tansman cites Fukuda’s name only twice in the footnotes, and describes his short essay, written in reply to a critique against his *Nippon no kakyō*, in just one phrase: “[t]he best argument for the purely poetic nature of Yasuda’s works.”⁶⁶ This comment is simply incredible. These are the reasons why I am trying to detect those elements inherent in Yasuda’s text that resist such reductive readings, while presenting a fundamentally different interpretation of it.

⁶⁶ Tansman, *Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, 311n77.

2) Yasuda Yojūrō's Transvestite Imperialism

The second example is the 1939 essay “Kawahara Misako,” included in the second version of *Japanese Bridges*, which presents his appreciation of Kawahara's 1909 autobiography, *Mōko miyage* (a souvenir from Mongolia). A Meiji woman who was born in 1875, Kawahara decided to engage in the project of educating Chinese women, went to Shanghai by herself in 1903, and then was invited to Kalaqin (喀喇沁), Mongolia by the royal family there. This first female Japanese teacher in the Continent, she taught at women's schools subjects like the Japanese language and so on. Moreover, she got involved in the intelligence activity in the context of the Russo-Japanese War, collaborating with the Japanese military officers.

Tansman frames Yasuda's take on this and other Japanese women's experiences in the following schema:

Yasuda's implicit argument that femininity most authentically embodies an unsullied native essence belongs to the broader cultural critique of the imposition of abstract universals on a local identity. To distinguish the native from the foreign, Yasuda associates the native and authentic with femininity, emotion, instinct, and beauty, all grounded in the particular circumstances of Japanese life and tradition. He contrasts these with masculinity, with inauthentic intellectual abstractions and rational ethics, belonging to foreign intellectual systems that universalize identity and are grounded nowhere in particular. (95)

He goes on:

Yasuda locates the Japanese essence in women because women, he believed, are most fettered, through emotion and motherhood, to the circumstances of their particular, local, everyday lives and are unsullied by the world of masculine abstraction and intellectual machination. (95)

Here again, he sets up a set of quite clear-cut oppositions such as feminine vs. masculine, native vs. foreign, particular vs. universal and so on.

However, I find both his reading and framework dubious for several reasons. Yasuda's extremely ambivalent and even conflictive depictions of the Meiji woman do not fall into such simple dichotomies, as I show in the following. If this is the case, it would suggest that it is Tansman himself, not Yasuda, who brings in these binaries. Therefore, one might suspect that they are his own preconceptions. Moreover, it is important to point out that these binaries are not only constative statements about gender, but the very act of applying them has a gendering effect. In other words, by applying these hierarchical dichotomies to a cultural other (in this case, "Japan"), Tansman is involved in presenting Japan as "feminine" as opposed to the "masculine" that is represented by the universal "West." Tansman may intend to objectively describe what Yasuda is doing, but he does not seem to make any special efforts to undo, or at least distance himself from, such gendered and gendering categorizations which have of course been amply challenged and problematized by feminist scholars.⁶⁷

Here I would like to briefly trace his essay to show what kind of desire he invests in this female figure. First of all, Yasuda describes her motivation to become an international teacher. Inspired by Shimoda Utako, a famous female educator in the Meiji period, she wished to be an educator, too. He also points out the historical context: "A romantic belief among our nation after the Sino-Japanese War—i.e., the mission to awaken Asia—was burning in this gentle woman [Kawahara]."⁶⁸ She was hired as an instructor for a newly-created female class at the Yokohama Daidō School for Chinese in 1900. At the same time, however, "while my dawn of hope has begun shining," quotes Yasuda, "I realized that, in order to engage in such a world enterprise

⁶⁷ See, for instance, Ueno Chizuko, "In the Feminine Guise: A Trap of Reverse Orientalism," in *Contemporary Japanese Thought*, ed. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 225-245.

⁶⁸ Yasuda Yojūrō, "Kawahara Misako," in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 206.

(*sekai teki jigyō*), I must have pride and faith in myself in face of the Westerners.” For this reason, she decided to learn a foreign language at the Kōran Women’s School established by a French catholic missionary. In the meantime, she became more and more convinced that educating Chinese women is a key for “proper guidance” (*zendō*) and “awakening” (*kakusei*) of the Chinese people.⁶⁹ In this way, there is no doubt that her “world enterprise” was a civilizational mission partly motivated by a mimetic desire for the “West.” Yasuda, too, uses phrases such as “enlightenment” (*keimō*) and “edification” (*kyōka*). Moreover, he praises this woman precisely because she envisioned such a “world mission” (*sekai teki shimei*).

Moreover, that “world mission” which this young Meiji woman came to feel with her sympathy typical of a literature girl (*bungaku shōjo fū na*), not to mention her action she dared with such boldness that is rarely seen even among heroines (*jōfu*), truly shows the deep image of a pioneer. It was only after the battle of Joshū [in May 1938], in going along with the state policy, that famous intellectuals and critiques of the Shōwa Japan dared to speak of the same “world mission.”⁷⁰

Contrary to Tansman’s interpretation, Yasuda no doubt applauds this female figure for her international and universal vision. Obviously, he thinks she is far from “fettered,” while she is said to be compassionate. Tansman misses the fact that her role as a teacher of the Japanese language abroad is something that traverses the separation between native vs. foreign in the first place. Moreover, while implicitly ironizing the contemporary discourse of the “world mission,” Yasuda compares her with Meiji heroes: “in the boldness and resolution of her action, she equaled the enthusiastic and devoted actions of those great men that Japan of the same period produced.”⁷¹ In this respect, Yasuda does not follow the traditional opposition between feminine vs. masculine.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 207-8.

⁷¹ Ibid., 208.

At the same time, however, we can see an interesting tension or ambivalence here. That is to say, Yasuda desires to differentiate Kawahara Misako from a modern type of women called *jojōfu* or *joketsu* (heroine or Amazon): “the word called “*jojōfu*” is a notion that was created by the Civilization and Enlightenment as the ideology of the opening of Japan in the Meiji era.”⁷² He repeatedly emphasizes that she was a gentle, caring, and natural Japanese girl. “It makes me feel very nostalgic that she did not have the character of the new Enlightenment, but very naturally lived the sentiments of old Japanese women.”⁷³ He even emphasizes that “there is no need for female mouths that speak of theory and propaganda. The highest human action that Miss. Kawahara conducted throughout the times of peace and war was made possible not by an artificial logic, but by a logic that the natural feeling of love teaches.”⁷⁴ Apparently here, he highly evaluates traditional gender norms. He goes on to make explicit his stakes in this essay: “I add a little irritatingly repetitive discussions about Miss. Kawahara, because I wanted to criticize today’s heroines of the time-of-crisis type or the state policy type as un-Japanese (*hi nihon teki*).”⁷⁵ In this way, these heroines would be those women who were modernized, and lost both their “femininity” and “Japanese-ness.” Yasuda is trying to distinguish Kawahara from them, because she was often regarded as a typical heroine. He wants to rescue her from the dominant interpretation.

In this way, Yasuda’s “feminism” reveals deep ambiguity and even contradiction in terms of Kawahara Misako’s gender. On the one hand, he praises the Meiji woman for her sense of the civilizational mission and international activity. In this regard, she was as good as the great Meiji men. In other words, he is not

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 210.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

celebrating her for traditional gender roles as a wife or a mother. On the other hand, he insists that she was not a modernized, masculine heroine, but a traditional Japanese woman who was very delicate and compassionate. He wants to stick to the essential notion of femininity that is based on the dichotomy of traditional vs. modern, feminine vs. masculine here.⁷⁶ For this reason, Yasuda runs the risk of splitting Japanese women into good and bad types, thereby excluding the latter as “un-Japanese.” In one word, he is saying that being a traditional woman and being a modern woman are compatible, while at the same time mutually exclusive.

However, it is questionable whether or not Kawahara was different from the degraded figure of “heroines.” It is important here to emphasize that this female figure with the “world mission” was involved in Japan’s imperial expansion. First of all, from the way she describes her own experiences, it is obvious that she understood her tasks as specifically “civilizational” missions.⁷⁷ Furthermore, once the Russo-Japanese

⁷⁶ Literary critic Iguchi Tokio discusses the “feminine” in Yasuda Yojūrō. See Iguchi Tokio, “Yasuda Yojūrō—inori to ‘onna’” [Yasuda Yojūrō: irony and woman], *Gunzō* (July 1999), 240-56. Referring to Hashikawa Bunzō’s work on Japanese Romantics, he says: “Yasuda was a ‘completely weak person,’ because he was a ‘woman;’ his thought was the ‘thought of pure slave’ [Hashikawa], because he was a ‘slave’ who won’t be a master (subject), refusing to participate in what Hegel called the dialectical struggle of death between the master and the slave.” (Ibid., 251.) Using the Lacanian psychoanalysis, he characterizes the woman/slave as pre-Oedipal imaginary refusing to accept the castration by the symbolic order of the name of father. In terms of the writing style, such woman/slave, he argues, corresponded to the traditional Japanese writing, whereas the modern subject was formed by the *genbun itchi* (unification of spoken and written language), which is regarded as a neutral style, but is actually modeled on the masculine. Moreover, he claims that these styles are equivalent to two forms of modern nationalism: “One is Japan as the ‘nation-state’ that was formed by *genbun itchi*, while another is Japan that returns to the name of ‘emperor’ who governs the beauty and sublime.” (254) Significantly, he also mentions Yasuda’s essay on Kawahara Misako, pointing out that Yasuda criticized *jojōfu* or heroine type as the modernized type of women. Suggestive as it may be, his whole argument is based on a series of simple binary oppositions that come down to traditional vs. modern. As a result, he completely misses Yasuda’s deconstructive ambivalence and his involvement in Japanese empire through his appeal to femininity.

⁷⁷ In Shanghai, she sought to instill the sense of punctuality in her students by strictly observing the class schedule. (Yasuda, “Kawahara Misako,” 211); she also pointed to the hygiene conditions, which she described as unclean and even filthy. In Kalaqin, she stated her aim was to “develop Mongolia that has been dormant for thousand years.” (214) Here she made efforts to “make the royal family pro-Japanese.” (219)

War broke out, her actions became straightforwardly imperialist. As he moves to this topic, Yasuda says:

I wanted to talk about her usual life in detail in the first half, and then only roughly about her wartime activities that gave her eternal fame in our society, because I wanted to touch upon the process of her whole humanity that resulted in such enterprise.⁷⁸

Here he stresses that the primary issue is her femininity, while her imperial adventures are merely secondary. Without these secondary episodes, however, she would have been scarcely famous or important. Kawahara, as the only Japanese left in the Kalaqin area, got involved in covert missions as a spy. As Yasuda describes, she sought to make secret investigations and reports on whether or not the maneuvers by Russians were going on within Mongolia. And, when Japanese units of special commandos arrived there, she helped them disrupting the Russian communication and transportation systems, and so on.⁷⁹ As a result, she was decorated in recognition of her outstanding service in the war.

In spite of her extraordinary actions, Yasuda insists that she represents a common type of gentle Japanese women. Yasuda claims that her achievements were all the more valuable, because she retained the essence of Japanese femininity. However, her actual actions not only show little sign of difference from the heroine type, but in fact seem more heroic than usual heroines would be: covert military maneuvers in the front line. In other words, the once negated, secondary moment, i.e., the heroic element, returns to supplement the primary moment of true femininity. The opposition he makes between Kawahara Misako as the real Japanese female and the heroine type as imperfect Japanese women collapses. His attempt at distinguishing them turns out to be based on a denial.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 222.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 222-7.

It is important, however, to recognize that the gender politics in Yasuda's text is quite different from the dominant discourse on women, as Alan Tansman describes it. His insistence on the essentialist gender norm constitutes only one aspect of his take on women. To be sure, he introduced a division and hierarchy within women based on this view. However, while this sort of operation of both idealizing and demonizing women is a quite traditional move in the masculinist ideology, Yasuda's take on gender seems to be irreducible to such a strategy. I would rather argue that his take on this female figure is determined by two competing motivations or desires: while he wants to differentiate Kawahara and heroines in terms of essential Japanese femininity, his point is to claim that a Japanese woman can be modern and international without losing her traditional and national beauty. By attributing two contrary, if not mutually exclusive, properties to Kawahara Misako, Yasuda is saying that a real Japanese woman should be both traditional and modern, and both national and global at once. Yasuda's claim is actually more cunning and demanding than the essentialist ideology: he expects women to be doubly competent in private and public lives, which can work as a double bind on women.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Significantly, Yasuda's ambivalence largely corresponds to the gender politics in the wartime mobilization regime. Ueno Chizuko points out that at the WWII, there were two types of gender policies in general: 1) "gender segregation model" that aims at "the nationalisation of the private sphere while maintaining the gender role assignment" such as motherhood, and 2) "integration model" that aims to "dismantle the gender role assignment itself" through public participation. (Chizuko Ueno, "Engendering the Nation," in *Nationalism and Gender*, trans. Beverly Yamamoto [Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004], 1-65. 43.) She observes that Japan's wartime gender policy was based on the segregation model, while at the same time it came close to the integration model because the state had to mobilize women as labor force due to a shortage of male labor. As a result, the total war regime in Japan, as in other Axis and Allied countries, promoted the "nationalization of women" (*josei no kokuminka*) to an unprecedented degree. Moreover, Ueno critically examines how representative Japanese feminist writers and activists, such as Hiratsuka Raichō, Takamure Itsue, Yamakawa Kikue, and Ichikawa Fusae, all ended up collaborating with the wartime regime—for two different strategic reasons, i.e., either segregation (difference) or integration (equality). As Ueno emphasizes, both strategies had to lead to an impasse: "If we go along with gender segregation we must adhere to norms of femininity, but as the converse of this we are able to acquire an autonomous domain inside a women's ghetto. At first sight, equality appears to be achieved by the strategy of disregarding gender. However, for as long as the public sphere is defined in terms of masculinity, women who become producers or soldiers have to resign themselves to being second-class workers or soldiers. This means taking on a double burden and doing their best to maintain their womanly role while being reduced to

In this connection, Ueno Chizuko makes an important point that the Japanese male subjects have a tradition of presenting themselves as “feminine” due to their inferior status vis-à-vis the superior other such as China. As Ueno and others such as Tomiko Yoda convincingly argued, Norinaga’s *kokugaku* is one of the representative cases. However, this never changes the fact, she says, that Japanese society has been patriarchal. She calls this more cunning version of male domination “transvestite patriarchy.”

In transvestite patriarchy, women are doubly marginalized. In the forced alternatives of either masculine or feminine, in the frustrating oscillation between men and women dictated by gender dualism, any counter-discourse of woman against transvestite patriarchy becomes, in turn, “masculine.” In just this way, in the recent past, feminized Japan exercised masculine power over its colonies such as Korea and Taiwan.⁸¹

Interesting as it is, Yasuda’s case seems slightly different. What is particular about Yasuda lies in his desire to present a Japanese woman who is both traditional and modern, and both national and global at once. Nevertheless, there is no denying the fact that Yasuda is appropriating her “femininity” for the sake of the empire. “Her affection in and of itself, as humanism,” Yasuda says, “agreed with the ideal of the state.”⁸² Women can and should be its active agent; natural womanliness does not contradict commitment to the state, that is the empire. Moreover, through this feminine move, he seems to imply that Japanese empire is so humane, compassionate

an auxiliary labour force.” (63) Thus, the wartime experiences proved, Ueno concludes, that “women’s liberation was impossible within the framework of the modern nation-state.” (64) For this reason, Ueno calls for “transcending the state,” or even “dismantling the category *women*,” because the gender difference itself is a modern construct formed within the nation-state. To this end, however, it would be necessary to first thematize the context of empire, which she does not take into account (except when she discusses the so-called “comfort women” controversy). One important effect of Yasuda’s gender politics was not only to “nationalize women,” but also to make them into agents of empire. Given Ueno’s historical accounts, it is possible to interpret Yasuda’s ambivalence as a type of gender politics that combines or conflates both strategies of segregation and integration. Thus, it is necessary to recognize that the imperial formation appropriates the very deconstruction of gender.

⁸¹ Ueno, “In the Feminine Guise: A Trap of Reverse Orientalism,” 241-2.

⁸² Yasuda, “Kawahara Misako,” 201.

and benevolent vis-à-vis the Asian peoples. A pioneer international educator who was aware of her “world mission,” Kawahara Misako served as an ideal figure for such a political purpose. To borrow Ueno’s phrase, one might be tempted to call Yasuda’s strategy “transvestite imperialism.”

What Yasuda’s desire for femininity in this specific case tells us is that in order to mobilize women for the empire, Yasuda, unwittingly or not, has to undermine traditional binary oppositions concerning gender. It also suggests that imperial formation would be effective if it emerges from the minority positions as in Kawahara Misako’s case. If in 1940, Yasuda speaks of the creation of Manchukuo in retrospect as “an expression of a new bold ideal of civilization and its world view,” he never “abandoned his lamenting feminine voice,” as Tansman says (100). On the contrary, such feminine voice remained instrumental in Yasuda’s transvestite imperialism.

Just like the example of Kinsuke’s mother, Yasuda’s take on Kawahara, albeit in a different political direction, is far from univocal. What Alan Tansman calls “fascist aesthetics” fails to grasp such elusive politics in Yasuda’s text. In the final analysis, the persistent binary oppositions Tansman is projecting onto his writing function as epistemological barriers that prevent him from penetrating the workings of ambiguity and ambivalence in empire.

In the next chapters, I will first show how Yasuda’s conception of Romantic irony deconstructs binary oppositions, producing profound ambivalence in his writing. I will then explore thematically how this ambivalence works in Yasuda’s Romantic colonialism in which the colonized subjects in Korea supplement the Japanese national identity called *kokumin* to form a “world historical” empire.

CHAPTER 2

A Genealogy of Romantic irony:

Yasuda Yojūrō and the Early German Romantics

Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry...It alone can become like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also—more than any other form—hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors.
—Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum* Fragment 116⁸³

Representation mingles with what it represents...In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split in itself and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles.
—Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*⁸⁴

The Japanese Romantic writer Yasuda Yojūrō is known for his use of Romantic irony. His notion and practice of irony derived from an intimate understanding of Hölderlin and the early German Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, commentators since Hashikawa Bunzō have debated over how to interpret the sources and functions of Yasuda's irony. Unfortunately, however, they are too often dependent upon traditional views on German Romanticism that are either based on its later, conservative period or derive from the hostile standpoint of its opponents such as Hegel and Schmitt. However, recently there have been considerable advances in the studies of the early German Romantics. They are no longer regarded

⁸³ Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 175..

⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1976]), 36.

as reactionary cultural essentialists, but rather interpreted as having achieved insights into textuality that even anticipated later post-structuralism. Also, the sophistication of their theoretical and philosophical project has been rightfully acknowledged as being comparable with German Idealism. In light of these new developments, Yasuda Yojūrō's take on the early German Romantics proves to be quite remarkable. Therefore, it is high time to propose a new interpretation of Yasuda's Romantic irony.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that Yasuda Yojūrō in his early 1930s essays comprehended the critical stakes of the early German Romanticism surprisingly well. Yasuda grasped its basic problematic as the "disintegration within the absolute," which set the task for the post-Kantian philosophical thinking. This notion also provided him with appropriate criteria to discern the different theoretical and literary standpoints among the German writers and thinkers of the late 1790s from Hölderlin to Fichte and Hegel to the early Romantics. While deeply sympathetic with Hölderlin as the "pure poet," Yasuda chose to follow the path taken by the Romantics, especially Friedrich Schlegel, a path of finding a solution within the disintegration through "Romantic irony." To explicate the theoretical implications of Romantic irony, I will discuss how it derived from the early Romantics' confrontation with Fichte's transcendental philosophy of reflection. It turns out that the Romantic appropriation of the concept as reciprocity and infinite self-mirroring deconstructed not only the dichotomy between the primary and the secondary, as well as the metaphysical notion of the absolute. As a result, reflection becomes a productive medium for self-presentation of the "absolute" in an altered sense, while the world in this self-mirroring reflection becomes that of textuality. In this Romantic notion of reflection, language reveals its profoundly metaphoric nature as catachresis, while the subject here gets both de-centered and infinitely doubled. Although Yasuda himself did not delve into such philosophical arguments per se, his commentary on Schlegel

undoubtedly shows that he recognized the reciprocal and also doubling character of the producer and the produced, and had the insight into the essential arbitrariness of a work of art, which he calls a “lie.” All these discussions lead to the notion of Romantic irony, which Schlegel characterized as “permanent parabasis.” As I will show, what Yasuda called “Romantic revolt” proves to be its equivalent. In concluding, I will raise a question of how Romantic irony can serve for imperial “world history,” which I will discuss in the next chapter.

“Disintegration within the Absolute”: Yasuda on German Romanticism and Idealism

In his 1933 essay on Friedrich Hölderlin, which comes out of his undergraduate thesis he submitted at the Tokyo Imperial University, Yasuda describes him as a “pure poet” who pursued the unity of life and art.⁸⁵ Referring to the young Hölderlin’s friendship with Hegel and Schelling at the theological seminary at Tübingen, Yasuda writes that Hölderlin belonged to the young generation in Germany who was enthusiastic over Kant’s critical philosophy and the French Revolution: they saw realization of freedom in the Revolution. However, the history of the late 1790s Germany turned otherwise. Nascent capitalism, he explains, promoted the separation between life and art, while the reality of the contemporary Germany was still caught up in the feudal social relationship. This was the socio-economic conditions in which these thinkers, as well

⁸⁵ Literary critic and Germanist Kawamura Jirō points out that Yasuda’s piece was one of the earliest monographs on Hölderlin written in Japanese, which coincided with the Hölderlin revival in Germany promoted by the scholars such as Friedrich Gundolf and Norbert von Hellingrath who belonged to the circle of the poet Stefan George. These intellectuals celebrated Hölderlin as the quintessential German poet, which was politically appropriated by the National Socialists in the 1930s. On the other hand, Kawamura also suggests that Yasuda’s reading of Hölderlin as a pure poet was not dissimilar to Georg Lukacs’s in his 1934 essay “Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*,” which interpreted him as an uncompromising sympathizer of Jacobinism. See Kawamura Jirō, “Herudaarin” in *Ironia no Yamato* [Yamato of irony] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003), 168-83.

as the *Frühromantik* or the early German Romantics, began their literary and philosophical career. He continues:

This historical time period of Hölderlin's was the one in which Fichte's "I" was elevated to Schelling's absolute. The disintegration within the absolute and the painful consciousness of this, as well as the reconciliation that sublates but preserves the oppositions—these were Hegel's terms that expressed new consciousness of life for the first time.”⁸⁶

While Yasuda does not explicitly theorize the relationship between the socio-economic conditions and their thought, his formulation of the philosophical problematic that captured this generation is quite remarkable. In fact, “the disintegration within the absolute” points to the very problem that the young three—Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin—sought to overcome in their so-called *das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (*Oldest Program toward a System in German Idealism*), a brief manuscript composed and written together in the spring of 1797.⁸⁷ As Philip Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue in *Literary Absolute*, these thinkers sought to resolve the consequences of Kant.⁸⁸ His transcendental philosophy eradicated any substantial principle by demonstrating that objectivity is constituted by the forms of our representations, which resulted in the unrecognizability of the things in themselves, while dividing the subject into the epistemological and practical subjects. In other words, it was reflective consciousness of subjectivity that

⁸⁶ Yasuda Yojūrō, “Kiyoraka na shijin” [Pure poet] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 213.

⁸⁷ This program addresses realization of freedom in harmony with nature by appealing to the idea of “beauty,” which involves themes such as remembrance of ancient Greece, and as a creation of a “new mythology” and “sensuous religion” based on the history and work of humanity that is realized as “the people.” Significantly it also speaks of abolition of the “state” as a mechanical system. Discovered, named and published in 1917 by Franz Rosenzweig, this document, which was certainly handwritten by Hegel, has been controversial in terms of its authorship. Rosenzweig first ascribed it to Schelling, which Wilhelm Böhm soon disagreed with in support for Hölderlin's authorship; and later, Otto Pöggeler and other Hegel scholars claimed it was composed by Hegel. For the original text and an English translation of the document, as well as a commentary on it, see David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and Languishing of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 16-44.

⁸⁸ See Philip Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 27-37.

brought about the “disintegration within the absolute.” As Yasuda says, however, “Kant willingly revealed the contradictions of his own theory” in *Critique of Judgment*, which attempted at synthesizing this split between knowledge and morality, nature and freedom, in the realm of art.⁸⁹ Following Kant, all post-Kantians tried to solve the question.⁹⁰ One of the earliest, and most influential attempts was made by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in *Wissenschaftslehre* (“doctrine of knowledge”) and its various reformulations that aimed at unifying the split through self-positing and the reflective consciousness of the I. In contrast, the younger generation of intellectuals from Schelling and Hegel to Hölderlin to the Jena Romantics, in their own ways, pursued an alternative, i.e., a possibility of a different conception and *Darstellung* of the absolute. *Darstellung*, a word that has multiple meanings such as presentation, figuration, staging and so on, was used in contradistinction to *Vorstellung* or representation as the faculty of subjective reflection. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue, these figures in the *Oldest Program* sought for the resolution in their conception of a “system-subject” in the form of “work of art.” Yet, they also parted their ways: while the philosophers came to conceive of a self-mediating “system-subject” as a totality such as “spirit,” the writers, especially the early Romantics, were more concerned about a theory of “literature” as a different version of *auto-poiesis*. What Schlegel called “Romantic poetry” as “progressive, universal poetry” (Athenaeum Fragment 121) is one important instance of this theorizing.⁹¹ As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue, that does not refer to any specific genre, but simply means “literature” in its most general sense of *poiesis* or production. That is to say, literature became a medium in which the

⁸⁹ Yasuda, “Kiyoraka na shijin,” 198.

⁹⁰ For a comprehensive account of the history of German philosophy after Kant in terms of how post-Kantians dealt with the paradoxes Kant’s *Critiques* introduced, see Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁹¹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 175; Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, ed. Wolf Dietrich Rasch (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1964), 38.

“absolute” is figured, staged and presented through fragments, allegory, wit and especially irony. Hence the “literary absolute.” The very project of “literature” as *Bildung* or the poetic and poietic self-formation of humanity was the product of this historic conjuncture.

Yasuda’s early essays on German literature demonstrate his exact understanding of such a problematic. What he referred to as the “disintegration within the absolute,” taken from the young Hegel’s formulation, constitutes the horizon that would determine the entire range of developments contained within both German Idealism and Romanticism. Hegel himself, by interpreting this disintegration as the “negativity” of subjectivity, claimed that absolute knowledge will be achieved as a dialectical process of negation in which the subject knows and realizes itself as the “spirit”; other writers and thinkers of these schools proposed alternative perspectives to this same problematic; the early Romantics among others responded to this question by the notion of “irony.” Yasuda was highly attentive to these differences. For instance, Yasuda observes that Hölderlin, unlike Hegel and the Romantics, could not bear the “disintegration.”

The pure poet cannot find dialectics or irony as an expedient method to get rid of the opposition between reality and self, or between self and other. He can find only two cases, either himself sinking to reality or bending reality to himself.”⁹²

In this context, Yasuda refers to Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*. He could have cited the following passage: “Whether we know it or not, the goal of all our striving is to put an end to that eternal conflict [*Widerstreit*] between our self and the world, to restore the ultimate peace, which is higher than all reason, so that we can unite with nature in one infinite whole.”⁹³ Hölderlin goes on to say, however, that this unification is only

⁹² Yasuda, “Kiyoraka na shijin,” 201.

⁹³ Translated and quoted in Krell, *ibid.*, 21

possible as an “infinite approximation.”⁹⁴ Hölderlin may have grasped a unity of “love” as “a real sacrifice that ties humans to a higher life,” as Yasuda says, unlike Fichte or Hegel who conceived of it as mere postulate for moral life.⁹⁵ But it was Hölderlin himself who identified a radical separation between subject and object as a “primal division” (*Ur-teilung* or judgment) in “being” as such. Moreover, if many of his works were dedicated to ancient Greece as an ideal, this yearning derived from the sense that it had long been lost. David Farrell Krell thus calls the absolute in Hölderlin the “tragic absolute.”⁹⁶ Yasuda fully understood that Hölderlin endeavored to live through enormous tensions in love and being. This is why he pays tribute to his profoundly tragic sensibility, and shows deep compassion for his fate: suffering from schizophrenia, he had to spend the rest of his life in the so-called Hölderlin Tower at the Neckar River in Tübingen until his death in 1843.⁹⁷ Yasuda kept his deepest respect for the poet into his later period and even named Hölderlin in his preface for *The Spirit of Man'yōshū* in 1942.

Yasuda on Schlegel and Romantic Irony

Fascinated as he was by Hölderlin, Yasuda himself takes the path of the Romantics, i.e., that of irony. For Yasuda, irony represents nothing but a way to find a solution within the very “disintegration” itself. This will be clear when one turns to his 1934 essay on Friedrich Schlegel, “*Lucinde*’s Revolt and the Crowed within Me.” *Lucinde* is an ironic and self-ironizing novel on love, friendship and decadence of a poet. Yasuda is concerned about the relationship between the poet (artist) and his work of

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Yasuda, “Kiyoraka na shijin,” 210.

⁹⁶ Krell, *ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁷ The motif of the fear of becoming mentally ill often appears in Yasuda’s early novels. In *Tōshin* (life size), for instance, the protagonist says: “...since I entered my college, I started studying psychiatry rather than my major field.” See Kamiya Tadataka, “Yasuda Yojūrō no shōsetsu” [Novels by Yasuda Yojūrō] in *Yasuda Yojūrō ron* [On Yasuda Yojūrō] (Tokyo: Kari shokan, 1979), 39-64; the quote on 60.

art, which is closely related to “Romantic irony” as Schlegel’s basic philosophy of art and literature:

He [Schlegel] believes that the freedom to create a work must secure the freedom to destroy the creation at the same time. The artist feels only discontent with himself. He inevitably knows the “lie” of a work, but it is a lie that is not false (*sakuhin no uso, itsuwari de nai uso*). And that is essentially what the artist urgently tries to express. The work and its author must always be mixed together. In creating it, the author must destroy the created reality of work at the same time.⁹⁸

Here, almost every sentence in this passage can be said to paraphrase early Schlegel’s Fragments in the late 1790s. Irony, Schlegel says, is a form of “continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self-destruction.” (Athenaeum Fragment 51)⁹⁹ This is one of the basic formulas of Romantic irony. These phrases such as the “fluctuating” (*Wechsel* or alternation), “self-creation” (*Selbst-schöpfung*) and “self-destruction” (*Selbst-vernichtung*) are the terms borrowed from Fichte, who employed them to designate the process in which the absolute I posits itself and annihilates the not-I as *Anstoss* (check or stimuli); as a result of this alternation, self-restriction (*Selbst-beschränkung*) will take place.¹⁰⁰ Because of this reliance, Hegel misrecognized that Schlegel was Fichte’s artistic epigone.

However, as the recent scholarship on the early German Romanticism emphasizes, Schlegel made a subtle but crucial turn in appropriating Fichte’s transcendental philosophy. Before going into this problematic in detail, I would first like to point out that Yasuda noticed the remarkable difference between Schlegel and

⁹⁸ Yasuda Yojūrō, “Rutsuinde no hankō to boku no naka no gunshū” [*Lucinde’s revolt and the crowd within me*] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 181. 「作品を創造する自由は創造物を破壊してゆく自由を同時に確保せねばならぬと彼は信じる、つねに不満だけが自己にある。彼は作品の嘘を、偽りでない嘘をのっぴきならず知っていた。しかもそれだけを早急に表現した。作品と作家とはつねに入り混じっていなければならぬ。創りつつ、その創られた作品の現実を同時に破壊せねばならぬ」

⁹⁹ Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 167; Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, 30.

¹⁰⁰ See Critical Fragment [Lyceum Fragment] 37. Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 146-7; Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, 9-10.

both Fichte and Hegel. For instance, Yasuda makes an insightful observation in the following statement:

All artists, not only Schlegel, are keenly conscious of their contradictions and most aware of the disintegration of their inner self...Perhaps, the influence of Fichte on the Romantics was none other than this fragment. That is to say, it would not be the influence of Fichte's philosophy of overcoming, but the influence of Fichte's existence or rather the atmosphere of the historical time in which Fichte existed.¹⁰¹

In other words, Yasuda is saying that, unlike Fichte, Schlegel did not believe the disintegration in the self can ever be eliminated. By the same token, Yasuda makes a critical commentary on "dialectics" in general. Yasuda's basic viewpoint is that the Schlegelian irony distinguishes itself sharply from Hegelian dialectics, too, at least in its later, systematized and popularized form: while the latter will sublate the terms by a third, higher concept, the former leaves them to their infinitely mutual, cyclical penetration, as I will show shortly.¹⁰² In addition, as I have noted in the previous chapter, Carl Schmitt criticized the Romantics for their tendency to advocate the "suspension of antithesis by a higher third," but this seems to be more appropriate for dialectics. In this way, Yasuda, again, goes along with Schlegel: Yasuda detests dialectics, in both Hegelian and Marxian versions, as something "apathetic"

¹⁰¹ Yasuda, "Rutsuinde no hankō to boku no naka no gunshū," 183.

¹⁰² In his own way, however, Schlegel employed the term *Dialektik* favorably. As Andreas Arndt and Jure Zovko write, "the irony becomes a method of thinking as it is assigned the philosophical task to conceptualize the 'insolvable conflict of the unconditioned and the conditioned.' Schlegel sees in this antinomic relationship the core problem of philosophy exposed by Kant's transcendental dialectics [in *Critique of Pure Reason*]; yet the antinomy is not a semblance (*Schein*), but is to be understood as paradoxical state of things captured and acknowledged by the irony and to be held valid in its contradictoriness." Andreas Arndt and Jure Zovko, "Einleitung" [Introduction] in Friedrich Schlegel, *Schriften zur Kritischen Philosophie, 1795-1805* [Writings on the critical philosophy, 1795-1805], ed. Andreas Arndt and Jure Zovko (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2007), xix. While trying to retain the original meaning of "dialectics" in the Platonic sense, Schlegel claimed that the antinomy has an objective significance as the interface in which the finite and the infinite are mutually related. See *ibid.*, xxiii-xxvii. It is also important to mention that "dialectics" in this sense comes very close to the conception of dialectics by the Kyoto school philosophers such as Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime. Their notions of "absolute contradictory self-identity" (Nishida) or "absolute mediation" (Tanabe) represent forms of dialectics without the absolute, first principle such as the I or spirit or matter, although they do not thematize the rhetorical and linguistic dimension per se.

(*mukiryoku*) because it cannot bear the tensions of continual alternation; in contrast, irony makes it possible to keep tensions and ambivalence intact, without falling into binary oppositions.¹⁰³

The Question of “Reflection” in the Early German Romantics

In order to highlight the critical stakes of the concept of “Romantic irony” and to show how Yasuda comprehended them, it is necessary in this context to take a brief look at the current interpretation regarding the confrontation of Schlegel and Novalis with Fichte, which has been one of the most important focal points in the studies of the early Romanticism.¹⁰⁴ The crucial question here is how the Romantics transformed the conception of “reflection” from its traditional understanding, including Fichte’s. This view regarded reflection as separated from and secondary to the immediate or the absolute that is supposed to exist in itself, independently of the reflection as the activity of a subject. In other words, it presupposes a dichotomy between the immediate as primary and the reflection as secondary. As a consequence, there arises a series of paradoxes which Kant’s critical philosophy brought about: the subject not only cannot recognize the object as it is in itself, but the I as the subject of reflection becomes inaccessible and incomprehensible to itself because the reflection brings about a split and doubling between the knowing and known subjects; in order to know

¹⁰³ See, for instance, Yasuda Yojūrō, “Weruteru ha naze shinda ka” (Why did Werther die?) in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 331. Yasuda often appealed to this form of irony, for instance, when he said in 1938 right before his trip to China: “If we seek for a spiritual symbol of our time, it is peace and war as irony. They were nothing but identical. Today’s war correspondent does not have time to think of a word that would sublimate them.” For Yasuda, “despair and conviction,” “decadence and construction,” “boldness and calmness,” and “destruction and defense” are all ironies, meaning the identity of the antitheses. Moreover, the distinction of the West and the East is said to be such an irony. See Yasuda Yojūrō, “Shōwa no seishin” [The spirit of Shōwa] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1987), 12-13.

¹⁰⁴ Here I will limit myself to Schlegel because Yasuda rarely referred to Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg). However, his *Fichte Studies* developed an anti-foundationalist and anti-representationalist conception of reflection and marks a central place in the early Romantic philosophy. As for Novalis, see Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 39-54, 151-76.

the knowing subject itself, it must fall in to *regressus infinitus*. Transcendental subjectivity is the name for this paradox. Early Fichte's argument in the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 just reinforced it by postulating the self-positing and self-reflexive consciousness called *Tathandlung* ("fact-act"), according to which the knowing act of the I is said to constitute its very being. The early Romantics developed their own philosophy in critical dialogues with Fichte's attempt as one of the first post-Kantian projects, which, however, led to deconstructing "transcendental philosophy" in general.

"Medium of Reflection": Benjamin on Schlegel

It was Walter Benjamin's doctoral thesis, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism* (1920), that launched, for the first time, this line of reading that situates Schlegel's appropriation of Fichte's transcendental idealism in the context of theorizing "reflection."¹⁰⁵ He argued that the Romantics reversed Fichte's discussion in a way that, contrary to the traditional presupposition, shows the priority and productivity of reflection. Describing Schlegel's notion of the absolute in contradistinction to Fichte's, Benjamin argues that "in itself, this absolute would most correctly be designated the "medium of reflection."...Reflection constitutes the absolute, and it constitutes it as a medium."¹⁰⁶ The absolute, which was supposed to be separate and isolated from reflection, not only merges with reflection in this "medium," but is constituted and produced by and in it. Importantly, Benjamin distinguishes this medium (*Medium*) from a dialectical "mediation" (*Vermittlung*),

¹⁰⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, trans. David Lachterman, Howard Eiland, and Ian Balfour in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 116-200.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

which still presupposes two poles of the reflector and the reflected.¹⁰⁷ Such a relationship between the reflecting and the reflected, then, evades the dichotomy between active vs. passive, and should be described in the middle voice.¹⁰⁸ Although Benjamin did not employ this grammatical category, it is interesting to note that the German term *Medium* also refers to it. However, how does such a reversal become possible? The key word here is the notion of *Wechsel*, i.e., reciprocity or alternation.

Benjamin quotes Schlegel's *Philosophical Lecture, 1804-6*:

Philosophy must have at its basis not only a reciprocal proof (*Wechselbeweis*) but also a reciprocal concept (*Wechselbegriff*)...For this reason philosophy, like an epic poem, must start in the middle, and it is impossible to lecture on philosophy and to pay it out piece by piece in such a way that the first piece (*das Erste*) would be completely grounded for itself and explained.¹⁰⁹

Schlegel calls such a thinking “cyclical philosophy.” Such reciprocity and cyclicity of philosophizing has enormous implications. “That philosophy begins in the middle,” Benjamin points out, “means that it does not identify any of its objects with *ur*-reflection, but sees in them a middle term in the medium.”¹¹⁰ Interestingly enough, Benjamin negates “*ur*-reflection,” i.e., original or originary reflection that would reach and touch the absolute, but it is crucial to understand that this does not mean he just

¹⁰⁷ In his 1951 recollection for the prewar years in which he served as the editor for the journal *Tetsugaku kenkyū* (philosophical studies) at the Kyoto Imperial University, Nakai Masakazu used these same terms to characterize the debate between Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime: he interpreted Tanabe's 1930 criticism against Nishida, published for the journal, as addressing the question of whether “*baikai*” should mean *Medium* as in Nishida or rather *Vermittlung*, which would be discontinuous and therefore truly dialectical. (See Tanabe Hajime, “Nishida sensei no oshie wo aogu” [Learning from Prof. Nishida's teaching] in *Tanabe Hajime zenshū*, vol. 4 [Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 196?], 303-28.) Nakai himself was sympathetic with Tanabe, because he believed that a responsible political action would be only possible with the latter conception. See Nakai Masakazu, “Kaiko jūnen” (the ten years in retrospect) in *Nakai Masakazu essensu* [Essential Nakai reader] (Tokyo: Kobushi shobō, 2003), 202-8. Yet, his point, which is critical of Nishida, provides an indirect support for an interpretation that Nishida's thinking has a significant affinity with the Romantic philosophy as specified here. If this is the case, one might be tempted to say that the “medium of reflection” corresponds to what Nishida called *basho* (place).

¹⁰⁸ See Jacques Derrida, “Différance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-27, esp. 9.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, 137.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

reiterated the traditional concept of reflection that would remain, by definition, secondary to what it reflects. Instead, Benjamin, along with Schlegel, is saying that “[r]eflection is logically the first and primary.”¹¹¹ That is to say, his major point is that reflection is not a secondary function, but rather the “medium” for the absolute. If this is the case, Benjamin is undermining the very dichotomy between primary vs. secondary in this whole reciprocal and cyclical relationship between the absolute and reflection.

It is important to add, however, that Schlegel already developed this idea of *Wechsel* in his earlier *Athenaeum* period, and that he did so by explicitly connecting it with the very notion of “irony.” See the following *Athenaeum* Fragment 121:

An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange (*Wechsel*) of two conflicting thoughts. An ideal is at once idea and fact.¹¹²

From this statement it follows that irony constitutes the negative aspect of the infinite alternation. Therefore, irony and reflection are the two sides of the same coin that is the medium of reciprocity. Remarkably, this fragment makes explicit that the irony synthesizes the “absolute antitheses,” which amounts to the same thing as relativizing the binary oppositions. Irony thus deconstructs the Fichtean dichotomy between the I as subject and the not-I as object, thereby undermining the priority and sovereignty of the subject position. In this regard, Schlegel made a radical departure from early Fichte’s subjective idealism.

Reflection as *Production*

As is clearly seen in these discussions, Schlegel’s conception of reflection and irony shows a profound affinity to deconstructive thinking. Critically elaborating on

¹¹¹ Ibid., 134.

¹¹² Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 176; Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, 40.

Benjamin's seminal reading, Winfried Menninghaus provides a theoretically rigorous reinterpretation of this whole argument from such a perspective. Benjamin's reading indicates, he argues, that "the absolute is nothing that precedes or evades the reciprocity, but nothing other than the totality of the not-absolute limbs of reciprocity, which is identical with the reflexive connectedness of 'everything real.'"¹¹³ These moments of reflexive connectedness, i.e., the reflecting (reflector) and the reflected, Menninghaus points out, show not only a semiotic structure of what Ferdinand de Saussure called *signifiant* and *signifié*, but its deconstruction through reciprocity and mutual alternation of these poles. Making this point, he says:

Reflection in Benjamin's understanding should be nothing otherwise than the reciprocal production of the reflected and the reflecting, as it were...[T]he differential splitting in the reflection poles not only not runs contrary to the immemorial absolute, but this absolute already finds itself in the position of the splitting-split reflection and therefore experiences self-presentation (*Selbstdarstellung*) in it.¹¹⁴

That is to say, Schlegel's insight into reflection, in this reading, implies, first of all, the absence of what Jacques Derrida called "transcendental signified," an ultimate, absolute presence of meaning that would be free from the structure of sign and

¹¹³ Winfried Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung: Die frühromantische Grundlegung der Kunsttheorie im Begriff absoluter Selbstreflexion* [Infinite doubling: the early Romantic foundation of theory of art in the concept of absolute self-reflection] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 57. From a slightly different perspective, Manfred Frank also stresses and documents in detail the importance of *Wechsel* concept in the formation of the early Romantic philosophy, which he claims was first developed by Novalis. Schlegel, he points out, appropriated the Fichtean terminology to mean strictly reciprocal determinations that are motivated by "the 'feeling' of a lack, also referred to by Schlegel as an imperfection (*Unvollendung*): 'a striving towards knowledge,'... a 'tendency [...] toward the Absolute,'... 'a longing [...] for the infinite.'" See Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, 184. Frank argues, first, that this appropriation represented a departure from Fichte's philosophy of first principles. Second, the priority of the feeling or emotion (*Gefühl*) suggests that the early Romantics such as Schlegel and Novalis show a tenet of an epistemological and ontological realism that acknowledges the passivity of a subject vis-à-vis the world. (If this is the case, it is far from inconsistent if Yasuda spoke of a certain kind of "realism," as he did in terms of "realism called Japan as irony.") For Frank's treatment of Schlegel, see *ibid.*, 177-219. From a Derridean perspective, Menninghaus criticizes Frank's theoretical standpoint developed in *What is Neostructuralism?*, which he claims is still caught up in the traditional notion of reflection. See Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung*, 267-75.

¹¹⁴ Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung*, 58.

signification.¹¹⁵ Rather, in what Menninghaus describes as “absolute self-reflection,” everything is susceptible to endless alternation of the chains of signifier and signified. Secondly, reflection in this conception functions as a “supplement” for the absolute, meaning that what was supposed to be secondary turns out to be “the first and the primary,” constituting the absolute. Menninghaus thus claims that what Benjamin called the “medium of reflection” indicates the “supplementarity” of reflection in Derrida’s sense. This represents a radical reinterpretation of *reflection* as *production* qua “self-presentation” of the “absolute” through infinite doubling and duplication. In short, the Romantic notion of reflection and irony, Menninghaus insists, not only rejected the “transcendental signified” and “metaphysics of presence,” but already fully gained the insight into what Derrida later called “*différance*.”¹¹⁶

It is in the Romantic theory of literature as “transcendental poetry” and in the figure of “self-mirroring” in particular that the deconstructive power of reflection is fully developed. Both Benjamin and Menninghaus refer to a famous Athenaeum Fragment 238 in which Schlegel compares poetry that is, literature, to “transcendental philosophy.” Significantly enough, this is also the passage that Yasuda Yojūrō would have in mind when he wrote in the above quote: “the work and its author must always be mixed together. In creating it, he must destroy the created reality of work at the same time.” Here is the Fragment:

...just as we wouldn’t think much of an uncritical transcendental philosophy that doesn’t represent (*darstellen*) the producer along with the product and contain at the same time within the system of transcendental thoughts a description of transcendental thinking: so too this sort of poetry should unite the transcendental raw materials and preliminaries of a theory of poetic creativity—often met with in modern poets—with the artistic reflection and beautiful self-mirroring... In all its descriptions, this poetry should describe

¹¹⁵ See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 20.

¹¹⁶ See Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung*, 115-131. See also Derrida, “Différance.”

itself (*sich darstellen*), and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry.¹¹⁷

Here again, in a seeming reliance on the “transcendental philosophy” à la Kant or Fichte, Schlegel performs a deconstructive operation on this mode of thinking. At a first glance, it may appear that when he talks about “represent[ing] the producer along with the product,” Schlegel is saying that the heroic, transcendental or rather transcendent subject can freely express or alienate itself, and thus have the license to destroy its expressions as its own property. Yet, he does not mean such a caprice or whim of the “Romantic” subject that would absolutize itself. Although this is one of the common preconceptions about Romanticism in general, it misses Schlegel’s point here. To “represent,” or rather present, “the producer along with the product” does not follow the representationalist model of expression, according to which the producer expresses and alienates itself in the product. This model presupposes the subject as an autonomous, proper, and self-identical entity. On the contrary, the phrase suggests that the producer is presented, i.e., reflected and signified, in the product. In other words, the producing subject is put in the object position, restricted and bound by the product, which amounts to saying that the presenter as signified in the work will be put in the position of the signifier or the presented. The product thus presents the producer in these senses. Here the hierarchy between the producer as subject and the product as object is not only reversed, but the subject position is reduced to a moment in the alternating chain of signification. One might immediately notice that this is not only one of the effects of radical reciprocity of reflection, but that the question of reflection and that of presentation (*Darstellung*) are inherently connected with each other.

¹¹⁷ Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 195; Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, 53. Benjamin quotes this passage in Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, 170.

Yausda's statement that "the work and the writer must always be mixed together" should be understood in this specific sense.

Because of this productive and creative nature of reflection, Schlegel calls it "artistic reflection," which he also describes as "poetic reflection." One of the key figures that Schlegel employs to illuminate the characteristics of this reflection is "self-mirroring," which gives a figuration to the strictly middle-voiced relationship between the reflecting and the reflected. In the Athenaeum Fragment 116 on "romantic poetry," Schlegel presents the same idea vividly:

Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry...It alone can become like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also—more than any other form—hover at the midpoint between the portrayed (*das Dargestellte*) and the portrayer (*der Darstellende*), free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors.¹¹⁸

The figure of endless self-mirroring of reflection that hovers and floats at the midpoint suggests not only that any ultimate beginning or endpoint is absent, but also that there is no original or its copy. Instead, everything in this process becomes an "image" (*Bild*) without origins and multiplies itself infinitely. Thus, romantic poetry, that is, literature in general, becomes the "universal" medium for the "whole circumambient world." Here the world is conceived as nothing but images and marks of the play of difference in the signifying process. In a word, the world becomes traces of textuality. Such is the basic concept that underlies the understanding of work of art in the early German Romantics.

At the same time, romantic poetry as self-reflexive, transcendental poetry is characterized by self-doubling. This is the reason why Schlegel at the end of Athenaeum Fragment 238 says that "[i]n all its descriptions, this poetry should

¹¹⁸ Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, 175; Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, 38.

describe itself (*sich darstellen*), and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry.” If one should specify a genre for this notion of “poetry of poetry,” which is inseparable from poetry per se, however, it would correspond to that of “criticism.” This dimension of German Romanticism was precisely what Benjamin’s essay was precisely concerned about. The notion that reflection is productive implies that criticism is not secondary to the work of art, but frees and completes the potentials inherent in it. In irony as a symbolic form, Benjamin maintains, reflection elevates itself to the absolute. Criticism of art exhibits this symbolic form in its purity; it disentangles it from all the inessential moments to which it may be bound in the work, and finishes with the dissolution of the work.¹¹⁹

This constitutes the significance of “transcendental poetry” as “poetry of poetry.” “Poetry of poetry is the comprehensive expression for the reflexive nature of the absolute.”¹²⁰ The self-reflexive and self-referential act of irony realizes freedom of literature as a productive mode of writing. In this way, criticism represents a self-mirroring of work of art. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Schlegel, as well as Yasuda, produced some novels, but was primarily engaged in writing essays and criticism. This is quite truthful to the idea of romantic poetry. As Benjamin claims, [t]he idea of poetry has found its individuality...in the form of prose; the early Romantics know no deeper or better determination for it than “prose.” In this seemingly paradoxical but in truth very profound intuition, they find an entirely new basis for the philosophy of art.¹²¹

Work as a “Lie”

Returning to Yasuda’s context, Yasuda’s piece on Schlegel, too, is a critical essay on his novel. For Yasuda, criticism represented a major form of writing. Here he did not regard Romantic literature as a mere expression of the autonomous self or

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, 172.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 171.

¹²¹ Ibid., 173.

absolutization of the arbitrary self, but understood it derives from reflection of the “disintegration” within the self. “The I is a contradiction itself. The absolute hovers (*tadayotte iru*). Consequently, the self is worthless (*kudaranai*)....the work *Lucinde* is conceived by an artist who begins his lifetime work with the self-consciousness that he is a worthless human being.”¹²² This statement, which somehow reminds us of Schlegel’s Fragment I quoted, shows Yasuda’s understanding that the Romantic novel lies in reflexively ironizing the artist himself. However, “the I,” Yasuda says, “who has reached the bottom of oneself is then expanded from there to infinite distance.”¹²³ That is to say, self-reverting reflection turns itself into an ecstatic movement to the world at the same time.

What is crucially important is how Yasuda grasped the notion of the “work” (*sakuhin*). His conception of work is, first, starkly different from the model of self-expression of the artist. Second, if Yasuda talks about simultaneous self-creation and self-destruction, it is far from purely negative, but productive in an eminent sense.

Here let us quote the important passage again:

He [Schlegel] believes that the freedom to create a work must secure the freedom to destroy the creation at the same time. The artist feels only discontent with himself. He inevitably knows the “lie” of a work, but it is a lie that is not false...The work and its author must always be mixed together.¹²⁴

Driven by the urge for the infinite, which also implies the discontent, the artist produces a “work.” Interestingly enough, however, Yasuda calls it the “lie of a work,” “a lie that is not false” (*sakuhin no uso, itsuwari de nai uso*). It sure means a literary fiction or creation. But it does not remain a mere fictive work in a commonsensical sense because it lies prior to the division between truth and falsehood. It implies that the work as created lacks something, because of a lie, or rather presents itself as

¹²² Yasuda, “Rutsuinde no hankō to boku no naka no gunshū,” 178.

¹²³ Ibid., 177.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 181.

excessive, because it is not false. Therefore, Yasuda is saying that literary production is a form of “lie” in a profound, “extra-moral sense,” to use Nietzsche’s phrase.

This is also in profound agreement with Friedrich Schlegel’s view of *Poesie* or literature. As Paul de Man argues, Schlegel gained insight into the “radical arbitrariness of any sign system” and therefore described language essentially as a metaphor or trope, which etymologically means “turning away.” Schlegel characterizes it even as “error, madness and simpleminded stupidity.”¹²⁵ In other words, they recognized that there is profound “catachresis” at the bottom of language, because a name and the named are structurally different. Needless to say, this line of argument is also supported by Menninghaus’s interpretation that Schlegel deconstructed the metaphysics of “transcendental signified” through the notion of “absolute self-reflection.”

Irony as “Permanent Parabasis”

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that the profound metaphoricity of language as catachresis provides the conditions of possibility, and also necessity, for something like “irony.” While irony is usually defined as “saying one thing and meaning something else,” it is rooted in the essential catachresis of language. When Schlegel says in one of his Fragments (Ideas 69), “[i]rony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos,” it suggests that irony derives from a speech act

¹²⁵ See Paul de Man, “The Concept of Irony” in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 180-1. In this illuminating talk, de Man discusses the relationship between Fichte’s philosophy and Schlegel’s conception of irony. De Man claims that the dialectic of the self-creation, self-destruction and self-limitation in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* can be read as a theory of linguistic trope, while associating his idea of *setzen* or positing with “catachresis” as a capacity of naming randomly. (Ibid., 173) However, this interpretation of Fichte is a rather non-standard if not forced reading that deconstructs the logicist nature of his consistent system. Curiously enough, though, it results in reinforcing the traditional interpretation that stresses the influence of Fichte on Schlegel and their continuity. It would be a more accurate interpretation to see early German Romantics as a skeptical move away from Fichte’s foundationalism and the search for the absolute first principle such as the transcendental “I.” See Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, 23-54.

of articulating this radical “chaos.”¹²⁶ Obviously, the so-called “catachresis” is another name for this “chaos.” Irony is a keen consciousness that any limited, finite enunciation is never adequate to this profound chaos that lies at the heart of speaking and writing. That is the reason why irony constantly undoes and deconstructs what is said. At the same time, it never remains negative, but reveals the metaphoric nature of “chaos” itself by multiplying names for it with wit, allegory and so on, just as reflection mirrors the whole world. This is the affirmative moment of Romantic irony. As Schlegel says, irony in this conception is far from a mere form of rhetoric in the traditional sense of persuasion, but becomes “Socratic” and even “transcendental” in its deconstructed sense. “Philosophy,” he says in the Lyceum Fragment 42, “is the real homeland of irony, which one would like to define as logical beauty... Only poetry can also reach the heights of philosophy in this way, and only poetry does not restrict itself to isolated ironical passages, as rhetoric does.”¹²⁷

What Yasuda described as “the lie of a work, a lie that is not false,” I argue needs to be taken in this sense. If this is the case, the entire passage of Yasuda’s which I quoted above can be understood as describing the nature of Romantic irony. How, then, does irony work more specifically?

Irony as a mode of poetic reflection represents a form of endless self-creation and self-destruction that mixes the producer and the product, the work and the artist. As such, irony brings about constant self-doubling. Significantly, in the above Lyceum Fragment, Schlegel identifies this self-doubling structure of irony as a “transcendental buffoonery”:

There are ancient and modern poems that are pervaded by the divine breadth of irony throughout and informed by a truly transcendental buffoonery.
Internally: the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all

¹²⁶ Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 247.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius; externally, in its execution: the mimic style of an averagely gifted Italian *buffo*.¹²⁸

This passage describes the movement of irony as “transcendental”; the mood (*Stimmung*) that rises above one’s own limitations, in turn, behaves like a buffo or clown toward the limited self. This going out of oneself and returning to oneself takes place in the ironic self-doubling simultaneously. If this is the case, self-reflection in irony is ecstatic at once. While such doubling is a practice of self-parody, it is important, however, to see that Schlegel does not necessarily identify the agent of irony with the I or a self-reflexive subject, but describes it as poetic, i.e., textual phenomena. Thus, Paul de Man understands the role of the ironic buffo in its specific relation to narrativity and rhetoric, which he means in a deep sense that derives from the essentially metaphoric nature of language. “The buffo, what Schlegel refers to in *commedia dell’arte*, is the disruption of narrative illusion, the *aparté*, the aside to the audience, by means of which the illusion of the fiction is broken.”¹²⁹ Irony is an operation that disrupts consistent and continuous flow of a narrative line.

Furthermore, de Man relates “transcendental buffoonery” to a rhetorical technique known as “parabasis,” which Schlegel mentioned elsewhere: “the irony is a permanent parabasis (*Parekbase*).”¹³⁰ According to Paul de Man, “parabasis” is “the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register.”¹³¹ He also illustrates it by referring to another rhetoric called “anacoluthon,” which means “a break in the syntactical expectations of the pattern.”¹³² Romantic irony as permanent parabasis repeats such operation throughout the text. Thus, it not only means one thing and says

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ De Man, “The Concept of Irony,” 178.

¹³⁰ Quoted in de Man, 179.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

something else as in a conventional irony, but constantly interrupts and undoes a consistent narrative line by doing so.

Parabasis as “Romantic Revolt”

For example of parabasis, de Man refers to a short chapter called “A Reflection” in Schlegel’s novel *Lucinde* that appears to develop a philosophical argument about the relationship between “the definite” and “the indefinite,” but that actually describes something completely different, i.e., a physical connection between a man and a woman. Schlegel consciously puts a “double meaning” in this passage.¹³³ This naturally caused a scandal, which suggests that parabasis is disruptive and subversive of the socially sanctioned norms that are embedded in the allegorical structure of a narrative. Thus, de Man provides his definition of irony: “permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes.”

The allegory of tropes has its own narrative coherence, its own systematicity, and it is that coherence, that systematicity, which irony interrupts, disrupts. So one could say that any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative, and it is ironic, as we say, that irony always comes up in relation to theories of narrative, when irony is precisely what makes it impossible ever to achieve a theory of narrative that would be consistent.¹³⁴

Significantly enough, in the very context of commenting on Schlegel’s seemingly scandalous episode, Yasuda, like de Man, recognized that *Lucinde* is a work that resists narrativity:

It is all about love. It has no narrative (*monogatari*) whatsoever. Needless to say, it has none of what can be called a plot (*purotto*). A narrative account in this case would be dull, literally boring.¹³⁵

Moreover, Yasuda contrasts narrativity with Schlegel’s pursuit of ideal love.

¹³³ See Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 118-21.

¹³⁴ De Man, *ibid.*, 179.

¹³⁵ Yasuda, “Rutsuinde no hankō to boku no naka no gunshū,” 187.

All he thinks about is friendship and love. He is deeply concerned about the basis of love such as the masculine and the feminine. The singularity (*yuiitsu no mono*) lies in instantaneity (*shunkansei*). Things like beauty, love and the arts belong to it. Here the theory of Romantic synthesis conceives of the instant act of love extremely mystically.

That is to say, true feeling of love and friendship is something that evades narrativity that accounts events with a coherent plot and a consistent story line. From this perspective, Yasuda rejects the charges against Schlegel. “The criticism this book received was launched against the lechery that would disrupt the customs and morals of a good family life. However, Julius is never a lecherous protagonist. He did nothing but idealizing and ironizing the unparalleled sacred love.”¹³⁶ In other words, Yasuda defends Schlegel, saying that his openness should be regarded as a criticism against the hypocrisy of a moralistic attitude.

Clearly, Yasuda associates narrativity with the dominant values and ideology of a civil society, which he calls *gunshū* or the crowd. In contrast, he closely connects the instantaneity and ideality of true feeling with what he calls “Romantic revolt” (*roman teki hankō*). At the same time, however, he does not equate this revolt with an elitist attitude that looks at the crowd with contempt and exceptionalizes himself. Instead, as the title of this essay—“*Lucinde*’s Revolt and the Crowded within Me”—shows, he has a keen consciousness that the artist is part of the crowd. This ambiguity is nothing but a doubling effect of Romantic irony. Thus, it becomes possible to identify Yasuda’s “Romantic revolt” as his version of “permanent parabasis” as the undoing and disruption of the systematic theory of narrative and ideology.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 188.

Conclusion: Romanticism and the Question of “World History”

In concluding, I would like to consider the political implications of the Romantic theory of reflection and irony. As I have shown, Romantic irony as a form of self-mirroring and self-doubling reflection proved to have a critical power to deconstruct the binary oppositions between the primary and the secondary, the absolute and reflection, the original and the copy and so forth. One of the important consequences of this ironic operation is nothing less than the recognition that there is no absolute identity, subjective or objective, human or otherwise. It thus inevitably leads to constant formation and deformation of an identity, on the one hand, and to essential ambiguity and endless doubling in the process of identification, on the other. Another consequence, however, is that the identity will be supplemented and constituted by the lesser term of the binary opposition that was supposed to be secondary and inferior. This is the logic of supplementarity implied in the Romantic theory of absolute self-reflection. Needless to say, such a critical conception of identity is effective in undermining forms of essentialism such as ethnic nationalism, racism, and sexism. However, there are certain social systems that are driven to overcome a given limit, distinction or boundary, thereby universalizing themselves. One can readily give the examples of imperialism and capitalism among others. These are potentially global social formations that tend to “deconstruct” themselves. That is to say, the moment of irony, in some form or other, is built in these mechanisms.

Another but closely related example is a narrative of “world history” that aims to integrate particular histories of nations and collectivities. As I have discussed, however, Paul de Man emphasized that irony as permanent parabasis destroys a system of narrative that grounds an identity formation. Here he is pointing to a deconstructive power of irony. In opposition to major theorists of irony such as Benjamin and Kierkegaard, who seem to suggest an ultimate sublation of irony by

realization of the absolute idea in history or the arrival of Christ, he juxtaposes Schlegel's passage that claims priority of chaos over human understanding: "Is not this entire infinite world built out of nonunderstanding, out of chaos, by means of understanding?" De Man then maintains:

Any attempt to construct—that is, to narrate—on no matter how advanced a level, is suspended, interrupted, disrupted, by a passage like this. As a result, it also makes it very difficult to conceive of a historiography, a system of history, that would be sheltered from irony. Friedrich Schlegel's interpreters have all felt this, which is why all of them, including Kierkegaard, have to invoke history as hypostasis as a means of defense against this irony. Irony and history seem to be curiously linked to each other.¹³⁷

This interpretation can be said to evaluate the destructive or deconstructive power of irony to the maximum. Yet, it also seems to contain certain ambiguity, because de Man opposes irony to history, while at the same time linking them to each other.

As a matter of fact, however, it cannot explain how and why both Schlegel and Yasuda, in their own ways, actually came to appeal to the idea of "*Universalgeschichte*" or "world history" in their later phases. In the case of Schlegel, he offered *Lectures on Universal History* at Cologne in 1805-6. Driven by the conviction that "all ideas, and the history of the human spirit; *everything*, everything originated in India without exception," he narrated a history of the human race as a process of transmission of the original civilization, i.e., India, by way of colonization and migration.¹³⁸ While his fascination with India surely dates back to his earlier period, this lecture course represents a certain shift in Schlegel's thinking. As Nicholas A. Germana says,

Schlegel's more cosmopolitan, intellectually radical, aesthetic Romanticism had, by 1805, been replaced by an effort to ground German history and culture in a tradition of unimpeachable nobility and antiquity—Vedic India.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ De Man, "The Concept of Irony," 184.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Nicholas A. Germana, "Self-Othering in German Orientalism. The Case of Friedrich Schlegel" in *The Comparatist*, vol. 34 (May 2010), 87.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

Schlegel's concern about medieval culture, Catholicism, and the Indian origin of the Germans became increasingly predominant, which culminated in his famous work, *Über die Sprache and Weisheit der Inder* (On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians), published in 1808. This turn was undoubtedly promoted by the humiliation of German states by France and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire by Napoleon in 1806. One important characteristic, however, that remained consistent in Schlegel's interests in things India and, by extension, German orientalism throughout this period is what Germana calls "self-Othering":

Self-Othering...was a curious rhetorical strategy which involved *two* distinct forms or acts of Othering—imaginative constructions of the oriental Other with whom one could identify and the western imperial Other, against whom one was seeking to construct an identity.¹⁴⁰

In fact, Schlegel's brother, August Wilhelm even stated that "[i]f the regeneration of the human species started in the East, Germany must be considered the Orient of Europe."¹⁴¹ This significant feature of German orientalism indicates the plasticity and malleability of geopolitical co-figuration concerning the East-West binary. Moreover, one might be tempted to see in it an echo of the Romantics' earlier philosophizing of reflection and irony. If this is the case, it will be hard to say that irony and history are mutually exclusive.

In an analogous manner, but in a different historical and geographical context with divergent political stakes, Yasuda Yojūrō was also increasingly concerned about the notion of "world history" since the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Under these circumstances, he made a forty-day trip to the Korean Peninsula and the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 81. For more on German orientalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Nicholas A. Germana, *The Orient of Europe: The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Germana, "Self-Othering," 84.

Chinese Continent from May to June 1938. Significantly enough, he consciously connects his project of “world history” with Romantic irony as a “transformative” power. As I will show in the next chapter, his travelogues unequivocally asserted the “world historical” mission of imperial Japan. Moreover, with this scheme he endorsed Japanese colonial rule in Korea by celebrating the desperate efforts of the colonized Koreans to become “Japanese.” If this is the case, rather than treat this fact as a mere episode that is notorious but accidental or “occasional” to Yasuda’s thought, or just reduce it to the historical context of Japanese imperialism, one might need to ask the question: how Romantic irony, in spite of its destructive power, could lead to, and become instrumental in, constructing a vision of “world history”? In the next chapter, therefore, I will go on to show how irony as permanent parabasis is at work in the imperial formation as developed in Yasuda’s texts, by effectively undermining any fixed identity, as well as binary oppositions. At the same time, however, I will also suggest how the colonized in the lesser position would supplement and constitute the dominant national identity by their practice of reflecting and mimicking the colonizer.

CHAPTER 3

Romantic Colonialism:

Yasuda Yojūrō and the Korean Peninsula as the “Japanese Bridge”

For a long time, the meaning of the Japanese word *hashi*—does it mean end, or, does it generally refer to boats used as intermediaries?—has been the topic of heated debate. *Hashi* [bridge] and *hashi* [chopstick] and *hashi* [ladder] all are *hashi*, but it makes good sense to understand *hashi* as that which connects two things, allowing movement back and forth across a flat surface and also movement up and down. Moreover, it is not at all odd to think that the people of old abstracted these means of movement back and forth and that for them *hashi*, which were facilitators of movement, were at the same time at the ends of things.

—Yasuda Yojūrō, “Japanese Bridges” (1939) ¹⁴²

To be sure, the bridge is a thing of its *own* kind; for it gathers the fourfold (*Geviert*) in *such* a way that it allows a *site* for it. But only something *that is itself a location* (*Ort*) can make space for a site....A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary (*Grenze*), Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing* (*Wesen*).

—Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking” (1951) ¹⁴³

There are ancient and modern poems that are pervaded by the divine breadth of irony throughout and informed by a truly transcendental buffoonery.

Internally: the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius; externally, in its execution: the mimic style of an averagely gifted Italian *buffo*.

—Friedrich Schlegel, “Lyceum Fragments 42” ¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Yasuda Yojūrō, “Japanese Bridges,” trans. Alan Tansman, *Journal of Japanese Studies* (34:2, 2008), 265. The first version of the essay was written in 1936. Tansman’s translation is based on the second version published in 1939. Yasuda Yojūrō, “Nihon no hashi,” in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū* [Collected works of Yasuda Yojūrō], vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 164-5.

¹⁴³ Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 154; Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Teil 2 (Pfullingen: Neske, 1967), 29.

¹⁴⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, Trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 148.

In this chapter, I will examine Yasuda Yojūro's literary involvement in Japanese colonialism in Korea in his travelogues that come out of his 1938 trip to Korea, Manchuria and China. By locating him in the historical contexts of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45 and the colonial policies by the governor-general's office in Korea, Japanese empire, I will ask how Yasuda's Romantic irony was involved in and served for Japanese empire.

I will first suggest how closely the notion of "world history" was tied with his motifs of irony, bridge and Romanticism in his imperial journey. I will then analyze his characteristic narrative and set of tropes in depicting Korea and the Korean people such as the "road of intercourse" and "*hantō*" or the peninsula. I will go on to thematize his encounter with Korean writers and intellectuals who were devoted to the so-called *Nihonshugi* or "Japanism" at the time. To this end, I will locate this contact in Japan's colonial policies in the late 1930s, as represented by "Japan and Korea as a single body" (*naisen ittai*) and the "military and logistic base for the continent" (*tairiku heitan kichi*). I will pay close attention to how Yasuda's ambivalent rhetoric of Romantic irony is at work in this narrative of imperial world history by suspending and transforming the meaning of Korean "independence" into what he calls "semi-independence." Furthermore, I will juxtapose Yasuda's response to the Japanist movement with the radical practice of a Korean intellectual, Hyun Yong Sup, who Yasuda met with in Keijō or Seoul. I will show how Hyun's conception of "Japan and Korea as a single body" derived from a universalist ideal with certain critical and ironical stakes in it. By analyzing this encounter from both sides of the colonizer and the colonized, I will demonstrate how Romantic irony inscribed in empire deconstructed and hybridized the notions of "Japan," the "Japanese" and the "national polity." Here I will suggest not only that Yasuda's world history was internally

contested by its peripheral encounter, but also that the figure of *kokumin* or the people emerged from this liminal place where heterogeneity is negotiated. In this contact zone, Yasuda and Hyun were complicit with and mirrored each other but in an asymmetrical way. Finally, I will also suggest that Yasuda's emblematic figure of *hashi* or "bridge" is an illuminating trope. In his essay "Japanese Bridges," Yasuda plays on the Japanese word *hashi* or bridge, which has so many homonyms such as "boats" (or "intermediary"), "chopstick," "ladder," and "end" (or "periphery"). According to his etymology, these words all mean "connect[ing] two things, allowing movement back and forth across a flat surface and also movement up and down." I will show that these polysemic elements—especially "boats," "ladder," and "periphery"—help explicate the movement of Yasuda's imperial project.

"World History," Irony, and Bridge—Yasuda's 1938 Imperial Journey

From May 1, 1938 to June 12, with the backdrop of the China Incident, the critic Yasuda Yojūrō, together with the writer Satō Haruo, traveled to the continent, starting from the Korean Peninsula through Manchuria to North China and Mongolia.¹⁴⁵ They were sent to the continent as reporters for the journal *Cogito*, publishing their accounts of the trip in various media such as *Cogito* and *Shinchō*. Yasuda compiled these essays into a book entitled *Mōkyō* (蒙疆).¹⁴⁶ This title is indicative of the political nature of

¹⁴⁵ This was the second trip to the Peninsula for Yasuda. The first time, he visited there and Manchuria in 1932, right after Manchukuo was established. As Louise Young points out, there was a boom of tourism to Manchuria since the establishment of Manchukuo. One of the factors that promoted this phenomenon was the growing mass media such as *Kaizō*, which sent critics and writers to the continent, organizing special issues. For instance, the January 1934 issue of the journal published an essay by Hasegawa Nyozeikan on Harping and Fujiki Kuzō's travel account on Rehe (Nekka). See Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 259-268, esp. 267. It is probable that Yasuda had read Fujiki's essay, given Yasuda's visit to Rehe.

¹⁴⁶ Yasuda Yojūrō, *Mōkyō in Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.16 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987), 7-193. To briefly summarize the course of the journey, the writers began with the Korean Peninsula, visiting famous places such as Keishū (Kyongju), Huyo (Puyo) and Keijō (Seoul). In Seoul, they met colonial intellectuals who were dedicated to the so-called Japanist movements. Then, moving through Hōten (Shenyang) in Manchuria, they arrived in China and stayed at such cities as Tianjin and Beijing. Significantly it was Takeuchi Yoshimi and other Japanese friends who guided the visitors in the city of

his journey: Mōkyō, or Mengjiang (Mengchiang), was the name of the puppet government that was created by Japan in the area of Inner Mongolia, showing that his travel was deeply imbricated with both Japan's war efforts and the wartime media discourse. Although the writers did not visit the battlefield directly, the military was always present on the train, in the cities or almost anywhere they visited. In these circumstances, more and more writers and intellectuals were being mobilized to visit the army and its soldiers in the battlefields and report to the Japanese public.

Before his departure, Yasuda wrote an essay entitled "*Shōwa no seishin*" (the spirit of Shōwa). He did not hide his excitement here. Declaring that the present was the time of "transformation," he emphasized the idea of "world history." He insisted on the significance of the current warfare.

The spiritual atmosphere (*kifū*) of our time has already transcended the spiritual history of our country. As the sole will to our mythical world history, it is now being practiced. All the conventional ethical system and international law have become impotent before this act. The fact of this act represents nothing but transformation of the existing world, its order and logic.¹⁴⁷

Obviously he meant by the "act" Japan's decision to go to war with China. It is important to notice that he explicitly stated that the current developments "transcended" the confines of Japan's national history. The warfare, he claimed, had a "world historical" significance that would transform the existing world system. More specifically, he claimed,

A step forward is now being made from Japan's independence to independence of Asia. In terms of cultural history, this represents reconstruction of world culture. It is new Japan's mission to assert the culture, spirit and wisdom of Asia, which has been excluded from the old world culture.¹⁴⁸

Beijing. See Yasuda, "Pekin," 78. Born in the same year of 1910, Takeuchi was Yasuda's schoolmate at the Osaka Higher School. Yasuda alone made an excursion to Mōkyō. On the return trip, he went over to Nekka (Rehe) within the Manchukuo area to see the Imperial Dwelling Palace at Chengde of the Qing dynasty. He met with Sato and others again in Ryojun (Lushun) to return to Kobe on a ship.

¹⁴⁷ Yasuda Yojūrō, "Shōwa no seishin" [The spirit of Shōwa] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.16 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987), 14.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

“Independence of Asia”—as I will show later, Yasuda undermined this very notion by his irony, but for now, it is necessary to note that he had this quite problematic view of the war not as Japan’s invasion, but liberation of Asia. He also regarded Japan as the “sole defender of Asia” that had fought against “the European invasion” since Japan opened the country.¹⁴⁹ He must have completely forgotten or repressed the fact that Japan was fighting a war with China, not with Europe. Here one has to see his deeply self-deceptive pride in Japan’s hegemony in Asia. It is undeniable that he was caught up with such jingoistic ideology of the prewar Pan-Asianism, and there is no defending him in this respect. In fact, such wartime remarks of Yasuda invited a number of criticisms against him, especially in the postwar, as I mentioned elsewhere. However, it does not seem to be very productive if it stops at merely denouncing him for these and other statements. My point here is not to criticize him for his affirmation of, and involvement in, the war as such, but rather to examine how his imperialism was motivated by his own literary imagination and what kind of effects it produced in his experience and writing.

In this regard, what is important to note is the fact that he clearly connected this “world historical” warfare and the notion of “Romantic irony,” which represents his defining theme. Irony, Yasuda argued, is essentially transformative. It does not represent “stasis” (*jōtai*), but “action” (*kōi*) and “transformation” (*henkaku*). If the present time, i.e., the era of Shōwa, is the time of transformation, it is the time of irony. He speaks of war in this context,

If we seek for a spiritual symbol of our time, it is peace and war as irony. They were nothing but identical. Today’s war correspondent does not have time to think of a word that would sublimate them.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

“Peace and war as irony”—this typical phrasing of Yasuda might also be rendered as “peace as an irony of war,” and vice versa. While he says these two things are “identical,” he is not trying to conflate both. The point is that the one cannot exist without the other. Or rather, he is saying that the one cannot remain itself, but becomes its opposite. In other words, he is negating the static identity and distinction of each. To be sure, this sort of rhetoric might seem indistinguishable from a rather banal justification of war that insists that a war is waged for peace. But his point is not necessarily to use irony to justify the war. He is not saying, at least literally, that a war is an ultimate form of transformation. But he means by transformation a meta-level necessity of “peace” and “war” constantly turning into each other.

Yasuda’s use of irony here reminds us of Friedrich Schlegel. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, he described irony as “an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts.”¹⁵¹ Irony in Schlegel represents a constant and reciprocal alternation of two poles (reflection and the reflected) that undermines binary oppositions, showing the absence of any fixed meaning and identity. Obviously, Yasuda does share this insight, but it is important to recognize that Yasuda took irony not only as a linguistic form in the narrow sense, but explicitly as a form of actual conduct, which means that he understood action and feeling as dimensions of signification and textuality. Therefore, for Yasuda, “despair and conviction,” “decadence and construction,” “boldness and calmness,” and “destruction and defense” are all ironies.¹⁵² “Today,” he says, “our Romantic irony is most explicitly expressed.”¹⁵³

Significantly enough, Yasuda clearly maintains that the distinction of the “West and the East” (*ryōyō*) is also this sort of irony. “The differentiation of the West

¹⁵¹ Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 176.

¹⁵² Yasuda, “Shōwa no seishin,” 12.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

and the East needs to appear as an irony of unity of both. In fact, this is the nature of the West and the East.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, he did not conceive of these terms as a binary opposition or essential difference at all. This remark is all the more important, because most commentators on Yasuda still tend to presuppose such a fixed, reified and essentialized dichotomy. Then, what about Japan? Where is Japan’s place in the world? “The cultural exchange of the West and the East,” he continues, “was the idea of the twentieth century culture. And the only achiever (*jitsugensha*) of this idea is Japan in the East.”¹⁵⁵ (By 1940, Yasuda would name such an ambiguous place in the world “Japan as irony.”) What may seem quite perplexing, however, is that he immediately goes on to talk about Japan as the “defender of Asia” against “European invasion.” Is he talking about the cultural exchange or the military opposition between the West and the East? While after all, the cultural exchange and war would also represent an “irony” for Yasuda, this is precisely the way his writing constantly displaces what he is talking about.

It is important to remember, however, the fact that Yasuda was writing this essay when he was about to travel to China with which Japan was waging a war. The so-called China Incident broke out just nine months before it. Although the Chinese capital was occupied by Japanese army, the intense battle was being fought at Xuzhou (Joshū), and it was during Yasuda’s stay in Beijing, on May 19, that the place fell to the Japanese army. This event was believed to represent a major turning point in the Incident, which was, however, going to be a long, protracted war resulting in Japan’s defeat in 1945.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 13-4.

In this connection, I would like to take a look at his travelogue on Beijing. It was precisely under such circumstances filled with uncertain hope and anxiety that he visited Marco Polo Bridge:

As the bridge Marco Polo once visited, the name *Rokōkyō* has long given me Romantic feelings and is one of the foreign bridges I especially mentioned a few years ago in my essay “Japanese Bridges.” The fact that the epoch-making gunfire was launched on July 7, the twelfth year of Showa [1937], along with Marco Polo’s journey that I introduced there, makes us feel even more Romantic. When you think of it, Japan, whose dim presence far in the distance invited the white man’s period of exploration, has finally appeared as the main actor of this century. The signal fire of its beginning was lit at this bridge, which keeps its ancient name.¹⁵⁶

Such a sense of excitement might have been an ironizing of anxiety for the unknown future. At any rate, this passage suggests how the figure of bridge gathered Yasuda’s motifs, i.e., Romanticism, world history, and irony. What made him feel Romantic was a certain exoticism associated with a foreign trip and the accompanying legend of Marco Polo’s monumental journey, which represents the first encounter of the West and the East. Moreover, the very enterprise of war was deemed Romantic, which he framed in the world historical meaning. At the same time, the bridge also symbolized Romantic irony in Yasuda’s sense as the conflictive unity in difference between the East and the West, as well as Japan and China. In this way, it is the symbolic register of the bridge that ties together all these aspects.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Yasuda Yojūrō, “Pekin,” in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.16 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987), 84

¹⁵⁷ In Beijing, however, his Romanticism was not fulfilled. What was disappointing was the reluctance to collaborate with Japan on the part of Chinese intellectuals and people. Guided by his old friend Takeuchi Yoshimi, Yasuda had exchange with Chinese writers such as the brother of Lu Xun. In contrast to his favorable views on the Korean Japanists, however, Yasuda was not satisfied with the cultural operation (*bunka kōsaku*) going on between Japanese and Chinese intellectuals. On the contrary, he was “enraged” with the latter. “They—the Beijing intelligentsia—first implicitly praise Chiang Kai-shek’s China; in so doing, then check Japan, and finally request Japan to change its policy toward China. Japanese high education officers are sent to negotiate with these verbose, detestable trade partners. Japan should rain as many as shells as possible instead of dispatching them.” (Yasuda, “Mōkyō,” in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.16 [Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987], 105.) Furthermore, Yasuda happened to observe a flag procession by local Chinese people in which they, with the Japanese Flag and the Five Color Flag in their hands, celebrated the fall of Joshū. “However,” he confessed, “from their procession,

The Discourse of “World History” and the “Road of Intercourse”

In this way, the notion of “world history” played a central role for Yasuda’s imperial journey from the outset. Here I will begin to examine how he figured this notion more specifically. In Keishū (Kyongju), an old capital of Korea, where Yasuda visited as the first place on his trip, he expressed his ambitions for the travel as follows:

We are about to travel to the North, in which Japan now dares to mark the world history of this century and engages in a great enterprise to transform the history of our nation. And the path I am now taking will lay the initial ‘road of intercourse’ (*kōtsūro*) for a new world culture. This road will for the first time be opened by a romantic Japan, which our Yamato *minzoku* will display to foreign countries and other *minzoku* around the world.¹⁵⁸

Unlike his established image as an anti-civilizational thinker, Yasuda was involved in the discourse of universal “world history.” Of particular importance is the phrase “road of intercourse.” In fact, Yasuda not only observed but found it significant that the conditions of transportation in Korea had been much improved, with automobiles increased and roads widened in comparison to 1932, when he made his first trip to Korea and Manchukuo after the Manchurian Incident. Thus, the romantic Japan that Yasuda celebrated was based on and legitimized by the narrative of world history and therefore was not opposed to, nor entirely different from, the regime of economic development and modernization. In fact, his journey this time was imperialistic in nature, that is to say, he took its route around the sphere of Japanese influence. Yasuda explained why he and his fellow travelers chose this route.

I felt none of those things such as the state (*kokka*), the people (*kokumin*), and nation (*minzoku*) that ground ideas and inspiration for great things today. In Beijing, generally, I had to experience cultural despair.” (Yasuda, “Pekin,” 72.) Thus, what made Yasuda feel disillusioned was in part this sort of passive resistance on the part of Chinese people, which not only disturbed Yasuda’s imperial fantasy and sense of superiority, but made him totally lose his sense of ironic detachment. He finally came to identify these Chinese people and intellectuals as the “enemy.”

¹⁵⁸ Yasuda, “Keishū made” [Until Kyongju] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.16 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987), 19.

Our route begins with Korea, through the axis line of Manchuria to North China and reaches Inner Mongolia, with our return trip through Nekka (Rehe), which, again, belongs to the new Manchuria. This route seemed to be a very rational way to look at our Japan of today and to think of its tomorrow... In order to learn from and think of the past and future of today's romantic Japan, I decided upon this path through which we can trace two thousand years of the long history of Japan's management of the continent (*tairiku keiei*).¹⁵⁹

“Two thousand years of the long history of Japan's management of the continent”—one has to say it is an extraordinarily wild, Romantic fantasy, but it was hardly divergent from some of the contemporary pan-Asianist discourse. What can clearly be seen here is that the so-called romantic Japan in essence conforms to the expansion of the Japanese empire. Therefore, this travel route was immediately geopolitical, corresponding to the historical traces and destiny of imperial Japan: Korea in this configuration would be taken as representing Japan's past, while both Manchukuo and Mōkyō are made to point to its future.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that his journey to the peninsula and to the continent was motivated and driven by the notion of “world history.” The received interpretation of Yasuda and the Japanese Romantics, however, tended to focus on the aspects of an anti-modern, particularistic and ethnic nationalism that rejects the rational, progressive, linear conceptions of time and history. To be sure, as Hashikawa Bunzō pointed out, the Romantic movement historically originated from the deepening crisis of modernity in the early 1930s, and was formed under the influence of German Romanticism, the demise of Marxism, and the heritage of National Studies (*kokugaku*); its essential element lies in the radical conception and practice of Romantic irony.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, one cannot emphasize too much the fact that the Romantics retained the idea of world history. In fact, the Manchurian Incident was

¹⁵⁹ Yasuda, “Keishū made,” 28.

¹⁶⁰ Hashikawa Bunzō, *Nihon roman ha hihan josetsu* [Introduction to the critique of Japanese romantics] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1995 [1960]), 28-35.

considered an epoch-making, quasi-revolutionary event in contemporary world history, one that would radically transform the desperate situation in an analogous way to the French Revolution. Therefore, they regarded the China Incident as a development of this transformative project.

Curiously enough, we can see here an interesting parallel to Friedrich Schlegel's conception of "universal history" based on a narrative of cultural transmission and migration, although Yasuda could not have read his lectures on it.¹⁶¹ In addition, one might also point out a certain influence of the Marxist discourse that theorized the world history as a development of "universal intercourse" as developed in *The German Ideology*, which Yasuda most likely had read by 1935.¹⁶² Moreover, the discourse of world history needs to be understood within the discursive space of imperial Japan after the outbreak of the China Incident. A prominent case is Miki Kiyoshi, one of the most influential philosophers for Yasuda's generation: Miki was not only the translator of the young Marx and Engel's work, but also was one of the major scholars and intellectuals at the Showa Research Association who, in trying to "solve the Incident," proposed the idea of "world history" based on the concept of the "East Asian Cooperative Community" (*Tōa kyōdōtai*) at about the same time. (I will look at the relationship between this project and colonial Korea later.) To be sure, Yasuda's take on this influential figure in the mainstream academic journalism was

¹⁶¹ See Nicholas A. Germana, *The Orient of Europe: The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009). 137-42.

¹⁶² See Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, trans. S. Ryazanskaya in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker, (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978 [second edition]), 162. Miki translated this German work into Japanese in 1930. Yasuda referred to it in one of his early novels, *Tōshin* (life size), first published for the journal *Cogito*, no. 37 (June 1935). The protagonist says he studies Marxism in order to refute the proletarian writers. "I read one of the book by Marx seven times. Really seven times. Then, at the seventh time, I was possessed by the confidence that I was speaking Marx' words, becoming Marx himself. This was the self-acquired technique of becoming a double [*bunshin*]. (...) I was taking a nap with *Die Deutsche Ideologie* under my head." See Yasuda Yojūrō, "Tōshin" [Life size] in *Yasuda Yojro zenshū*, vol.1 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985), 376-408; the quotes from 386-9. As for Yasuda's novels, see Kamiya Tadataka, *Yasuda Yojūrō ron* [On Yasuda Yojūrō] (Tokyo: Kari shokan, 1979), 39-64.

quite ambivalent from early on, and became increasingly critical, rejecting his agenda of the Community by 1939.¹⁶³ But it would go too far to say Yasuda was quintessentially an anti-modern, anti-civilizational thinker. He did envision Japan's imperial project in terms of the "world historical" development of intercourse. At the very least, even apart from the question of whether or not such a conception is specifically or intrinsically Romantic, it is an established fact that the Romantic authors were deeply intrigued by a view of history as some spatial and temporal developments.

What is important to recognize is how Yasuda's notion of Romantic world history is motivated by a certain tropic structure. At this point, we can discern two distinct moments in Yasuda's conception of world history specifically. First, world history per se, while inciting the sublime feeling of "Romanticism," is nevertheless still conceived of in terms of the civilizational mission that is vertical or hierarchical in nature. The second, closely related aspect is the figure of *kōtsūro*, or "the road of intercourse," as the horizontal expansion of this world historical project. To illustrate

¹⁶³ Interestingly enough, one of Miki's first essays on "world history" was published in June 1938, i.e., after Yasuda had departed for the trip. See Miki Kiyoshi, "Gendai nihon ni okeru sekaishi no igi" [The significance of world history in contemporary Japan] in *Miki Kiyoshi zenshū* [Collected works of Miki Kiyoshi] vol.14 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967), 143-50. As for the East Asian Cooperative Community, see its manifesto *Shin Nihon no shisō genri* [The principles of thought for a New Japan], published under the name of the Cultural Research Group of the Showa Research Association in January 1939. See Miki Kiyoshi, *Shin Nihon no shisō genri* [The principles of thought for a New Japan] in *Miki Kiyoshi zenshū*, vol. 17 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968), 507-533. Yasuda often refers to Miki in an ambivalent manner. See, for instance, the essay "Hōhō to ketsui," included in the first version of *Nihon no hashi* (Japanese bridges) in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū* vol.4, 51-66, in which Yasuda discusses Miki's 1936 essay "Tōyō teki ningen no hihan" [Criticism of the Oriental man]. Moreover, it was in January 1939, precisely at the same time when the Showa Research Association published "The Principles of Thought for a New Japan," that Yasuda wrote his famous essay "Bunmei kaika no ronri no shūen" [The end of the logic of the Civilization and Enlightenment] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.7 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 11-21. In this essay, while still speaking of the "world historical" nature of the Incident, he criticizes "Marxist literature" as "the last stage of the logic of the Civilization and Enlightenment." He especially targets the "bureaucratic" way of thinking among contemporary intellectuals promoted by certain academic journalism. When one takes a look at another essay published immediately after this, it becomes clear that this attack was directed against Miki and Iwanami shoten for which he served as an adviser. Yasuda also mentions the "East Asian Cooperative Community" in this context. See Yasuda Yojūrō, "Jihen to bungaku" [The incident and literature] (published in March 1939) in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol.7 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 28-40.

these two moments, I will invoke in the next section his emblematic figure, i.e., *hashi* or the “bridge” in its polysemic elements. First, the figure of world history signifies a *hashi* as the civilizational “ladder” (*hashigo*). Second, as the road of intercourse represents another *hashi* as the means and route—“bridge” or “boat”—for imperial expansion. These tropic figures, as I will show, serve as analytical frameworks to characterize Yasuda’s imperial project.

Narrativizing Korea as a “Semi-Independent” “Peninsula”

These two aspects of Yasuda’s world history are fully articulated in the figure of *hantō* or “the peninsula.” Here let us examine his specific narration of a history of Korea, which reveals the imperial nature of his project.

In his essay, “Impressions of Korea,” Yasuda provides his most comprehensive view on Korea.¹⁶⁴ Here he begins with his reflection on the past history and culture of Korea and then goes on to talk about the current situation in which the so-called *Nihonshugi* or Japanist movements emerged.

What are Korea’s cultural undercurrents? My shallow impressions are not sufficient, but leaving aside the Gija legend and Tan’gun legend for now, I am interested in the national character (*kunigara*) that survived in spite of the neighboring Chinese dynasties of the Mongols, Ming, and Qing, forming a semi-independent country since the unification by Silla. This national character is not that of the Mongolians nor that of the Manchurians nor that of the Han. With this question in mind, I observed things Korean, enjoyed Korea’s scenery and read its literature.¹⁶⁵

As is clearly seen in his tendentious choice of the word, “semi-independence,” Yasuda downplays the historical significance of the unification and state-formation of Korea by Silla.

¹⁶⁴ Yasuda Yojūrō, “Chōsen no inshō” [Impressions of Korea] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986), 45-57; first appeared in *Cogito* (November 1938).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

But the enterprise of the unification by Silla, which is said to have marked the very beginning of “Korean” history, was independence not so much by Koreans as by the T’ang dynasty. Korea was able to establish a state in its subsequent history because Japan’s check has always been effective against the continent.¹⁶⁶

Yasuda seems as if he had forgotten the history of the mid-seventh century in which Japan’s intervention into the peninsula completely failed. Yasuda does however, mention this historical fact of the defeat of Japan and its ally Baekje vis-à-vis Silla elsewhere, but he strictly narrates its positive outcome, emphasizing the artistic and technical contributions of Baekje’s refugees to the Japanese court. In this account, he implies that the ancient Japanese state was internationally open and even multicultural.¹⁶⁷ In this way, his intent to make light of Korea is so open and explicit that he keeps emphasizing its inferior position in the history and geopolitical space of ancient East Asia.

There would be no way to revive the culture of Silla. All Korean nationalism (*minzoku shugi*) is false, not only today, when the Korea that existed as an old road of intercourse has now changed its comings and goings, but also in terms of the cultural ethics of tomorrow’s world. Even the ethics that the humanists in Japan proper envision for the peninsula is false. The fact that the peninsula did not perish, after all, owes to the existence of Japan since the inception of its history.¹⁶⁸

In this way, Yasuda seems to dismiss out of hand any capacity of Korea to be autonomous, dismissing its attempts to be independent. Yet, as I show later, this does not necessarily mean that he eliminated every potential of “nationalism” for Koreans: the sole exception is to encourage nationalism in the form of “*Nihonshugi*” or “Japanism.”

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ See Yasuda Yojūrō, “Fuyo” [Puyo] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 16, 38-42.

¹⁶⁸ Yasuda, “Chōsen no inshō,” 46.

Before going to this problem, however, let us first focus on what is characteristic in his narrative. Yasuda describes Korea primarily in terms of its geographical location between Japan and China, heavily relying upon the figure of *hantō* or the “peninsula.” In other words, this geographical feature serves as a trope for Korea’s cultural and political place in the East Asian world. It is important to notice that this figure of “*han-tō*” (半島) is closely connected to another description, i.e., “*han-dokuritsu*” (半独立, “semi-independence”), in its insufficient or imperfect quality of “*han*,” that is, “half” or “semi-” (半). For now, it will suffice to point out that the trope of *hantō* has two different, somewhat contradictory effects. First, it works to deprive Koreans of any autonomous agency, because the people tend to be reduced to a mere natural geography. Second, however, it also helps talk about the historical present in such a way to incorporate “*hantōjin*” or the “peninsular people” into the world historical project led by imperial Japan; the peninsula would provide an essential link or “bridge” to the continent. These aspects, I argue, correspond to the double meaning of *hashi* I mentioned above. That is to say, the hierarchical character of the first *hashi* as a “ladder” is implied in the subordinate status of the “*han*,” whereas the second *hashi* in the sense of a “bridge” or “intermediary” can easily serve as a metaphor for the spatial figure of the *hantō*, at least from the perspective of the Japanese archipelago towards the continent. I will call this tropic structure of Yasuda’s imperial project a “peninsula-bridge” regime. If this is the case, my reading of Yasuda’s narrative in terms of *hashi* is supported by this connection.

Just as Yasuda reduces the Korean people into the mere geography, Yasuda devaluates them in cultural terms, contrasting Korean culture with that of the Japanese, which is supposedly essential and original.

The culture that Koreans created is extremely meager. In the worlds of poetry, literature and painting, which are the most genuine fields of a native culture, they possess no worthwhile works. Yet, it is unusual that this *minzoku*, lying

between China and Japan, neither invaded the continent even once, nor was ever destroyed.¹⁶⁹

From the present perspective, such discriminatory talk of cultural hierarchy is utterly untenable in many ways. As a matter of historical fact, however, Japan's cultural debt and influence from the Korean peninsula were enormous, ranging from important technologies such as iron to the arts and culture like Buddhism and Confucianism.¹⁷⁰ By ascribing these imports to the Chinese continent, and describing Korea as a mere "route" for them, Yasuda is trying to minimize, if not disavow, Japan's large debt to Korea in its cultural history. The only exception, it seems, is the case of Baekje's influence on the seventh century Japan. In addition, it is also arguable that even the Japanese imperial family descended from Korea. Significantly enough, Yasuda did not clearly deny its possibility, as I mention later.

While it may be tempting to dismiss Yasuda as a mere chauvinist plagued by the prewar imperialist view of history, it would not be an adequate criticism if it is based on the standpoint of a national history that presupposes fixed categories of "Japan," "Korea" and so forth, and requires self-identification with them. In other words, such a denunciation would repeat the kind of national identification that is similar to its object of criticism. Rather, it is necessary to keep in mind that these figures are nothing but historical constructs in certain conjunctures. Interestingly, Yasuda was actually not unaware that he was involved in one of the historic moments in modern history in which the malleable figure of the "nation" was being reshaped and refashioned. The performativity of Yasuda's engagement with reconfiguring the nation requires further attention in order to make visible the historicity of this critical conjuncture in Japanese empire.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷⁰ See Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, updated edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 33-4.

Exposure to the “Japanist” Movement by Korean Intellectuals

In May 1938, Yasuda Yojūrō visited the city of Keijō (Seoul) where he met with a number of Korean intellectuals who were involved in the *Nihonshugi* or “Japanist” movement. This was a critical historical moment when the new *kōminka* (皇民化, imperialization) policy, including the “oath of imperial subjects” (*kōkoku shinmin no seishi*) and the volunteer soldier system, had been introduced by the Korean governor general’s office. Under this asymmetrical colonial power relationship, these enthusiastic writers and intellectuals endeavored to become “real” Japanese. In fact, Yasuda was quite impressed by these efforts and was lavish with praise of them. In other words, Yasuda showed due sympathy for those colonized who needed recognition from the colonizer. Both parties thus seem to have reached mutual understanding and recognition. However, as I will analyze in the following sections, their contact, which affected their subsequent writings, was filled with ambiguity and ambivalence on both sides of the colonizer and the colonized. My reading of the traces of the meeting will reveal another important dimension of *hashi* that I call the “periphery as a site of encounter.” As I will show, the periphery is a liminal place where one meets the other. In this encounter, one’s identity will be revealed to be split, heterogeneous and hybrid.

In contrast to his initial mode of cultural and historical narrative, the tone of his essay becomes affirmative when he refers to the developments after the China Incident that changed the whole situation in a drastic manner. Yasuda asserts that today’s Korea is not what it used to be:

But the Incident has made us understand for the first time that the culture that was transplanted from Japan was not merely the external forms of the culture of Western Europe. Many of the people of the peninsula have understood the world and Japan in world history, apparently obtaining their self-awareness of

being Japanese from that of *having been* Japanese. This means that the ideal of Japan has appeared in the peninsula for the first time. (italic mine)¹⁷¹

The Japanese ideal was something that could be “transplanted.” So was the spirit. Therefore, even if one was not Japanese, one could become Japanese. Moreover, one could even have the awareness that he or she had already been Japanese. If Yasuda really means this, it would amount to saying that “Japanese-ness” is not only not the exclusive monopoly of, the so-called “Japanese.” But it also means that it is never original to them, because someone who was neither born in Japan nor was Japanese can retroactively become Japanese. This would be the opposite to an essentialist understanding of “nationality.” This “nationalism” of Yasuda’s type, at least at face value, is fundamentally different from such an ideology of ethnic nationalism.

Interestingly enough, Yasuda celebrated this awareness without any hint of irony here:

Thanks to our great enterprise of today, the peninsular path as the old route of intercourse has changed drastically. The peninsular problem, which is coming up on seventy years since its emergence in the Meiji, now seventy years later, faces the possibility of a solution such that Japan and Korea would become as one (内鮮一如, *naisen ichinyo*).¹⁷²

Although he does not use the term *naisen ittai* (内鮮一体) or “Japan and Korea as one body” here, what he saw in Korea was a political trend toward this since the outbreak of the China Incident. If the Incident was the turning point, it means that the problem of the Japan-Korea relation is inevitably embedded in its further relation to the continent, which is suggested in his description of Korea as the “route of intercourse” in this very context. In other words, not only the relation, but also the possibility of “oneness” between Japan and Korea is mediated by or even dependent upon something else, that is to say, the continent. This suggests that Japan and Korea can

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷² Ibid., 50.

become as one *vis-à-vis* China. It is precisely at this conjuncture that the trope of *hantō* as the second *hashi* (bridge or boat) manifests its political implications most clearly. The “peninsula” symbolizes a regime of complicity and mobilization of the colonized in further imperial expansion, as I will discuss later. What is crucially important here is to understand that “oneness” under this “peninsula-bridge” regime is always already deferred and displaced in relation to the beyond, that is, the continent.

It is a rare thing that the peninsular people have come to know the Japanese state as an ethics. In their ethical life, the lowest of all the commoners here are superior to the Chinese in terms of their value today.¹⁷³

Yasuda seemed to equate “ethics” and “value” with knowledge of the Japanese state, which then constitutes the center of the “oneness.” As is clearly seen here, oneness is internally structured by the first *hashi* as the ladder of the vertical order between Japan, Korea and China. Therefore, his vision of world history develops itself essentially as a hierarchy of the states. And now the Japanese state was now at war with China.

They [Koreans] read the “oath of imperial subjects” everyday. They see off soldiers to the battlefield, make constant donations, and assist families in the home front. Some of them even have come to participate in the imperial army for the first time. No one could have forced this spirit of service on the home front.¹⁷⁴

When Yasuda maintained that “the people in the peninsula have obtained cognition of the world for the first time,” it meant nothing but the awareness and becoming on the

¹⁷³ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 50. “The oath of imperial subjects” is composed of the following phrases: the oath number one, which is meant for the school children—“1. We are the subjects of the Great Japanese empire. 2. We work together to dedicate our loyalty to His Majesty. 3. We train ourselves to become excellent, strong people (*kokumin*)”; the oath number two, which is intended for the students and adults—“1. We, the imperial subjects, will devote ourselves to the emperor’s country with loyalty. 2. We, the imperial subjects, will strengthen our union with mutual trust and cooperation. 3. We, the imperial subjects, will elevate the imperial way by nurturing perseverance and discipline.” See Kawamura Minato, *Umi wo watatta nihongo* [The Japanese language that crossed the sea] (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1994), 147. As for the oath, see also Yasuda Toshiaki, *Shokuminchi no naka no “kokugo gaku”* [Studies of kokugo in the colony] (Tokyo: Sangensha, 1997), 62-88.

part of Koreans as imperial subjects, which should be demonstrated through active participation in warfare.

Under these circumstances, the internal ambivalence in the oneness of Korea and Japan had to manifest itself in a violent fashion. First of all, it was all too obvious that the colonial subjects were never equal to native Japanese citizens. In other words, precisely because complete assimilation was impossible, the Koreans were driven into the desperate attempt at identification as the imperial subjects. It was in this situation that Japanism emerged in Korea, both anticipating and responding to the colonial government's policy of *kōminka* or imperialization that aimed at making Koreans into loyal imperial subjects of the Japanese emperor.

In this connection, Yasuda touched upon various attempts at pro-Japanese collaboration. In particular, he referred to two major movements. One group is called *Kōkoku jinmin undō* (the “people of the imperial nation movement”) led by Jung Nam Soo (鄭南水), who studied in the United States and was a Christian. Another example is the organization called *Daitō minyūkai* (大東民友会 [sic]) based on the statist Cha Jae Jung (車載貞).¹⁷⁵ Significantly, as Yasuda notes, “many of these people converted from nationalism (which is not that of Japan), socialism, anarchism and communism.”¹⁷⁶ He points out the “reason” for conversion. “The reason for this, they say, is that they have a far wider recognition of the world than narrow-minded nationalists (*minzoku shugi*).” Interestingly enough, *Nihonshugi* as these Koreans

¹⁷⁵ According to Tobe Hideaki, Cha was a converted activist who had participated in the 1929 Kwanju student incident. He was one of the founders of the organization for Korean former leftists, “大同民友会.” See Tobe Hideaki, “Shiryō to shōgen I. Nitchū sensō ki Chōsen chishikijin no Tōa kyōdōtai ron. Shiryō kaidai” [Materials and testimonies I. The discussions of the East Asian Cooperative Community by Korean intellectuals in the Sino-Japanese War period. Introduction] in *Quadrante* no. 6 (March 2004), 344. The study group “Overcoming Colonial/Modernity” (*Shokuminchi kindai no chōkoku kenkyūkai*) has edited important collections of essays by colonial intellectuals during the period of the China Incident who responded to both the *naisen ittai* policy and the discourse of the East Asian Cooperative Community. Cha's essay, “Tōa shin chitsujo to kakushin” [The East Asian new order and reform] is available in Choi Jinseok's Japanese translation for the journal. See *ibid.*, 368-72.

¹⁷⁶ Yasuda, “Chōsen no inshō,” 51.

understood and practiced it represented a much more universal standpoint than the other modern ideologies such as anarchism and socialism, not to mention Korean separatist nationalism. The term *minzoku shugi* (民族主義) in this specific context was regarded as a backward, unenlightened attitude clinging to a particularistic principle that is *minzoku*. On the contrary, for these colonial intellectuals, the *kōminka* project represented a universalistic standpoint of “world history.” This was the very reason why they converted to Japanism. Yasuda continues:

These peninsular Japanists, I heard, discuss questions such as whether or not Japanese nationalists (*kokka shugi*) argue for the Nazi type purity of blood. Rather, I know well that Japanese rightists embrace emotionally, or almost sentimentally, their international love for spreading the imperial way (*kōdō*). Surprisingly, this Japanism in the peninsular people advocates even the abolition of the Korean language.¹⁷⁷

Precisely because they committed themselves to the universalistic standpoint, these colonial intellectuals could not help but be concerned about the tendency of ethnic essentialism among Japanese nationalists. Behind the seemingly pious attitude of the Japanists were there implicit critical stakes in their discussion about the racist politics of German National Socialism. In other words, these Korean intellectuals were involved in two distinct agenda at the same time: while trying to overcome ethnic nationalism within Korea, they intended to pressure “*minzoku shugi*” on the part of Japanese nationalists. In contrast, however, it is highly dubious whether the mainstream Japanese rightists were indeed so philanthropic, as Yasuda supposed.

Of particular interest is that through introduction by Japanese intellectuals in Keijō, Yasuda had a meeting with one of the representative pro-Japanese collaborators (*chinilpa*), Hyun Yong Sup (玄永燮).¹⁷⁸ As was the case with other Japanists, he, too,

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, 51-3. It was Professor Takagi Ichinosuke at Keijō Imperial University who introduced Hyun to Yasuda. At Keijō, Takagi taught *kokubungaku* (national literature) and was involved in the colonial policy of *kokugo* (national language). See Kawamura Minato, *Umi wo watatta nihongo*, 133-9.

had converted from anarchism. The China Incident marked a turning point for him, as well as for other Korean intellectuals. He began collaborating with the Japanist organization called *Ryokki renmei* (緑旗連盟, the green flag league) founded by the Japanese inhabitants in Korea such as Tsuda Katashi, the professor at the preparatory school for Keijō Imperial University, Morita Yoshio and so on. In July 1938, when *Kokumin seishin sōdōin Chōsen renmei* (the Korean league for the total mobilization of national spirit) was created in the first anniversary of the Incident, Hyun became the chief of this organization. Moreover, what made him most infamous was the fact that he enthusiastically advocated the abolition of Korean language.¹⁷⁹ Quite naturally, after the collapse of Japanese empire and the subsequent liberation in 1945, he was denounced not only for collaborating with the colonial rule, but for attempting to annihilate cultural identity of the Korean people or *minzoku*. He is said to be a

In this context, it is important to note that Takagi was the person who invited the linguist Tokieda Motoki to the university. As is well known, Tokieda was the major theorist of *kokugo* or the national language. Needless to say, the idea of *kokugo* had an essential connection with the ideology of *kokumin*. Obviously, Hyun's proposal to abolish the Korean language was strictly in line with both theory and policy of *kokugo*. As for Tokieda's *kokugogaku* and its fundamental criticism, see Naoki Sakai, *Voices of the Past. The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 320-336. Also, for its relation to Japanese colonialism, see the following numerous studies: Kawamura, *ibid.*, 148-155 and 223-257; Yasuda Toshiaki, *Shokuminchi no naka no 'kokugogaku'* and *Kokugo no kindai shi* [A modern history of the national language] (Tokyo: Chūōkōron, 2006), 90-132; Fukuma Yoshiaki, *Henkyō ni utsuru nihon* [Japan mirrored in the periphery] (Tokyo: Kashiwa shobō, 2003), 230-259; Tomiko Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 146-81. There are several important points to make about Tokieda's theory and its relation to Japanese imperialism. First, as Fukuma's study emphasizes, the notion of *kokugo* was necessitated precisely because of Tokieda's encounter with the colonized in the periphery and the felt need to linguistically integrate them. My argument in this paper demonstrates a similar problematic in the case of Yasuda Yojūrō. Second, as Yasuda Toshiaki's recent work pointed out, in the context of Japanese empire as a whole, "*kokugo*" was employed in a way that is both differential from and complementary to the notion of "*Nihongo*" or the Japanese language. In Japan proper and its colonies such as Korea and Taiwan, the term *kokugo* was predominant; however, in other areas within the so-called Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, such as Manchukuo and South East Asia, the name *Nihongo* was used to refer to the Japanese language as a common language for diverse *minzoku*. A similar parallel can be said to exist in the relation between *kokumin* and *minzoku* in the empire as a whole. That is to say, both *kokumin* and *minzoku* functioned as different but closely connected technologies for Japanese imperial rule.

¹⁷⁹ For Hyun and *Ryokki renmei*, see Takasaki Sōji, "Chōsen no shinnichi ha" [Pro-Japanese collaborators in Korea] in *Kindai nihon to shokuminchi* [Modern Japan and the colonies], vol. 6 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1993), 123-147.

forgotten figure today. In spite of this, his influence in the *kōminka* period is indicated by the fact that Hyun's book, *Chōsenjin no susumu beki michi* (The Path that Koreans Should Take), was a bestseller of nearly twenty thousand copies.¹⁸⁰ As Yasuda admitted, however, this fact was not well known in the metropole of Japanese empire. Yasuda never relented in celebrating this work. "Here the Japanist stance among the peninsular intelligentsias under the Incident is explained with clarity and vivid expressions."¹⁸¹ Yasuda provided a succinct summary for his reader.

The conclusion of this interesting book states that, in order to exercise their personal capacities and engage in a universal mission (*sekai teki ninmu*), Koreans must first become Japanese *kokumin* and have the awareness as Japanese.¹⁸²

What is remarkable in this passage is the fact that Yasuda reads Hyun as identifying the Japanese as *kokumin* (国民), instead of *minzoku* (民族). While the latter tends to be used as a social category describing a collectivity according to its particular ethnic difference from others, *kokumin* primarily refers to the people that constitutes a political unity of a nation and shares an equal membership. If the colonial government's imperialization policy sought to mobilize and integrate the colonial population in the empire, it did so by making them Japanese *kokumin*. In other words, *kōminka* (imperialization) practically meant *kokumin-ka* (nationalization). In the meantime, some Korean Japanists like Hyun read it as a symbol for achieving an equal status with the native Japanese. It is true that there were other Korean intellectuals and activists who pursued a different strategy that would resist complete assimilation trying to retain their ethnic language and culture, as I show shortly. However, as Yasuda rightly pointed out, Hyun's take on *kokumin* was distinctive in his orientation towards its "universal dimension." If Hyun tried to radically identify with the

¹⁸⁰ Yasuda, "Chōsen no inshō," 51.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid., 52.

colonizer through even abandoning his own language, he was driven by a desire for world historical universality. This also meant he was critical of the Korean ethnic nationalists.

Yasuda not only recognizes Hyun's claim as serious and genuine, but also makes a significant remark: "If Japan does not know how to answer *this essential something*, if it ignores this enthusiastic spiritual effort to become one with 'Japan', it will be Japan's failure" (italic mine).¹⁸³ Here he is far from cynical because he was aware that the attempt of these imperial subjects to become "real" Japanese implicitly questioned whether or not "Japan" was fully qualified as the leader for this "universal mission." How then did Yasuda himself responded to this "essential something"?

Japanese Colonial Policies in Korea: "Japan and Korea as a Single Body"

Before going on to deal with this crucial question, let us here clarify the historical context of this encounter between Yasuda and the Korean intellectuals. As scholars such as Tobe Hideaki and Choi Jinseok point out, the current Japanese and colonial governments were forced to mobilize the human and material resources in Korea as the Sino-Japanese War since 1937 was becoming increasingly an all-out war.¹⁸⁴

Naisen ittai (内鮮一体) or "Japan and Korea as one body" was the policy that the governor-general Minami Jirō implemented and which aimed to obtain the support and involvement of the colonial subjects in Japan's war efforts by promising to realize a certain equality with the Japanese citizens. Specifically, the policy purported to

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ See Tobe Hideaki, "Shiryō to shōgen I. Nitchū sensō ki Chōsen chishikijin no Tōa kyōdōtai ron. Shiryō kaidai" [Materials and testimonies I. The discussions of the East Asian cooperative community by the Korean intellectuals in the Sino-Japanese War period. Introduction] in *Quadrante*, vol 6 (March 2004), 339-352; Choi Jinseok, "Shiryō to shōgen II. Nitchū sensō ki Chōsen chishikijin no naisen ittai ron. Shiryō kaidai" [Materials and testimonies II. The discussions of Japan and Korea as a single body by the Korean intellectuals in the Sino-Japanese War period. Introduction] in *Quadrante*, vol 7 (March 2005), 291-308.

guarantee certain social rights such as compulsory education and universal suffrage. In exchange, the colonial government sought to open up military careers to Koreans, first by a volunteer soldier system in 1938 and then in the form of a draft system in 1942. As Yasuda noted in the above quote, the first volunteer soldiers had been gathered in April 1938 right before he visited Korea. Furthermore, the government planned to make Korea into a “military and logistic base for the continent” (大陸兵站基地, *tairiku heitan kichi*), which aimed to mobilize the human and material resources in Korea for the sake of the Japanese war effort.

There were two different responses on the part of the colonized toward this move. One was the enthusiastic embracement of this policy called *tettei naisen ittai* (徹底内鮮一体) or “Japan and Korea as a complete single body.” Hyun Yong Sup was known as one of the representative ideologues of this standpoint that insisted that Koreans become Japanese by abolishing the Korean language and acquiring the Japanese one. Another reaction was the so-called theory of “Japan and Korea as a cooperative single body” (協和的内鮮一体, *kyōwa teki naisen ittai*), as advocated by the converted Marxists such as In Jeong Sik and Kim Ming Sik. As Tobe and Choi demonstrate, the latter was a strategy chosen in order to intervene into the discourse of the “East Asian Cooperative Community” (東亜協同体, *Tōa kyōdōtai*). Despite the fact that this idea was originally addressed to China and Manchukuo, these Korean intellectuals endeavored to transform it to include colonial Korea, which was envisioned as a step towards greater autonomy and possible decolonization in the future. While the *tettei naisen ittai* sought to improve the status of Koreans by becoming the same imperial subjects as the Japanese—that is, *kokumin*—, the strategy of the *kyōwa teki naisen ittai*, I argue, was to create a wider space for autonomy and cultural difference by being recognized as a different *minzoku*. In so doing, the latter aimed to retain their ethnic and cultural identity including the Korean language.

Needless to say, they were highly critical of the attempt at complete unification by the Japanists.

However, this latter intervention was a risky project in that it would actively collaborate with the wartime regime of total mobilization. In particular, the move for the “military and logistic base for the continent” was appealing to the proponents of the *kyōwa teki naisen ittai*, because this policy had the potential to modernize Korea through increased investment in heavy industry and implementation of compulsory education. However, this strategy of intervention was a double-edged sword in that it would inevitably implicate Korea in the Japanese war regime and colonialism in relation to Manchukuo and China in a more intensified manner.¹⁸⁵ Obviously, this is the danger inherent in what I called the peninsula-bridge regime of Japanese colonialism. In this respect, despite the different strategic stakes, both agenda on the part of Korean intellectuals ran the risk of ending up reinforcing, and being incorporated into, the colonial regime.

In spite of all this, however, it is important to notice that these categories of *kokumin* and *minzoku* were never fixed labels that are merely applied to a given population by the imperial power. Instead, I would rather claim that not only the application, but the articulation, of these social categories in their specific signification was contingent upon a complex, performative field of hegemonic power-relation, as well as negotiation, between the colonizer and the colonized. Later in my discussion, I will evoke the third aspect in the trope of *hashi*, which I call the periphery as the site of encounter, because I would like to emphasize this process of interaction.

¹⁸⁵ For more detailed treatments of the discourse of the East Asian Cooperative Community and “*kyōwateki naisen ittai ron*” in particular, see Hong Jeong-uk, “Sen kyūhyaku sanjūnen dai ni okeru shokuminchi Chōsenjin no shisō teki mosaku” [Intellectual search by colonial Koreans in the 1930s], in *Chōsen shi kenkyūkai ronbun shū* [Essays in the studies of the Korean history] no. 42, 2004; Tobe Hideaki, “Tenkō ron no senji to sengo” [The wartime and postwar theories of conversion], in *Dōin teikō yokusan* [Mobilization, resistance, and collaboration] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2006), 315-322; Yonetani Masafumi, *Ajia/Nihon* [Asia/Japan] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2006) 114-152.

Japanese Colonialism and Yasuda's Romantic World History

These are the developments of the *kōminka* policy after Yasuda visited Keijō. Yasuda did not refer to the phrase “*naisen ittai*” yet in the 1938 essay, “Impressions of Korea,” nor did he meet with the advocates of “Japan and Korea as a cooperative single body.” But he continued his keen interest in what was going on in colonial Korea. In order to look at Yasuda's response, here let me turn to his essay entitled “Ruins of Asia.”¹⁸⁶ This piece, published in January 1940, is a recollection of his trip. Here we can see most clearly how Yasuda's rhetoric of irony is at work in his romantic colonialism.

Yasuda mentions the new developments in colonial Korea:

I heard that it was around September 1939 that the governor-general in Korea began to speak of “the military and logistic base for the continent” and “the simultaneous development of agriculture and industry” (*nōkō heishin*), with “Japan and Korea as one body” as its ground.¹⁸⁷

Yasuda did not hide his admiration for these policies.

I realized that something like one's country and its independence, as Korean nationalists considered it, was nothing but a mere theoretical notion associated with the former old regime. Today the historical thought of Japan has brought home to me that history will transform the basic system of the world, just as it did for the people at the time of the French Revolution.¹⁸⁸

In this way, he insisted that “Japan and Korea as one body” and “the military and logistic base on the continent” meant nothing less than a final rejection of Korean ethnic nationalism and the separatist movement. If he dismissed Koreans' struggle for independence, he did so from a putatively higher instance of a regional order that went beyond the Wilsonian principle of the self-determination of peoples. In his view, the

¹⁸⁶ Yasuda Yojūrō, “Aja no haikyo” [Ruins of Asia] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986), 141-158.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 144.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 145.

Japanese colonial regime represented something new in history. It is crucial to recognize that Yasuda justified these projects through a narrative of world history that located the current engagements of the Japanese empire in the peninsula and the continent within the genealogy of world historical events such as the French Revolution. In the twentieth century, the Manchurian Incident, he claimed, represented a historical break that began a whole new process.

There may be various comments on the concept of “the military and logistic base for the continent.” But, frankly, this is a pleasant thing to hear. In spite of some criticism against the cognition of the colonial government, both Japanese and Koreans can be proud of this, in that neither Britain nor the Soviet Union could take up such a world policy. Thus, such thoughts as “Japan and Korea as one body” and the oneness of Koreans and Manchurians, when concretized as the military and logistic base for the continent, can be said to be one of the greatest Romanticisms among the thoughts of the current Incident.¹⁸⁹

It would make an imperialist feel very pleasant, for sure, if the colonized people so spontaneously collaborated with the imperial project, as he believed. In making this sort of “frank” comment, he is affectively identifying himself with the positionality of the metropole, about which he does not show the slightest doubt. But why does the “military and logistic base” excite Yasuda’s imagination so much? Is it merely because of his militaristic excitement or the imaginary of pan-Asianist expansionism? As I have already suggested, the two tropes of mutually related forms of *hashi* characterize his view of world history: the civilizational ladder and the bridge of imperial expansion, which I also called the peninsula-bridge regime of Japanese colonialism. In this configuration, this military and logistic base can be regarded as one concrete instance of the second *hashi*, as a bridge or boat to the continent. If the idea of the “military and logistic base” incites his “Romanticism,” it has much to do, I

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

claim, with the tropic imagination of *hashi* that underlies Yasuda's literary imperialism.

Undoubtedly, this whole narrative of world history is based on his imperial conceit that Japan represented something new in history, which neither capitalist Britain nor the communist Soviet Union could ever realize. By the same token, he believed that the Japanese empire has finally made ethnic nationalism an obsolete idea, a remnant of the nineteenth century. But what provided the ground for these seemingly wild assertions?

The legitimation of the military and logistic base in the continent has been made possible through the formation of *kokumin*. I was very moved, reflecting upon the status of Korea in history. *When in its two thousand years was there ever a day when Korea became a truly independent country? Or, was there ever a day in which the land and people of Korea emerged as a road of world historical intercourse such as we see in the current form of the military and logistic base? When the imperial way of Japan expands, it alters the concept of the road of intercourse (kōtsūro) in world history, and this was not brought about by a Soviet type theory of control. This fact delights me as one of the grassroots people (sōmō no tami) because this was a history created by kokumin.*¹⁹⁰ (italic mine.)

しかし大陸兵站基地論も、国民の形成したものによってなったのである。私は歴史上における朝鮮の地位を考えて感無量であった。朝鮮が真の独立国となった日は、その有史二千年のいつにあったらうか。あるいは今日の大陸兵站基地論の如き形で、朝鮮という土地と民衆が、世界史の交通路として浮出された日があったらうか。日本の皇道の伸展するとき、世界史の上の交通路という概念を変更し、しかもそれがソヴェート式統制理論より生まれなかったことを、私は草莽の民の一人として、それが国民によって作られた歴史であったゆえに欣ぶのである。

Again, as this quote shows, Yasuda's "world history," while inciting the sublime feeling of "Romanticism," is still conceived of in terms of the civilizational mission that is vertical or hierarchical in nature. Another, closely related aspect is the figure of *kōtsūro*, or "the road of intercourse," as the horizontal expansion of this world historical project. Furthermore, the last passage makes clear the agent of world history.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 145-6.

The subject who would accomplish this project is the figure of *kokumin* or the people. Therefore, his *kokumin* does not imply ethnic nationalism, but should be taken as “world historical” in its ambition. Most importantly, he claims that the “military and logistic base” was not a product of the control from above as in the Soviet Union. On the contrary, it is the subjective participation of the *kokumin* in Korea that enabled this world historical project.

Yasuda’s Romantic Irony and Ambivalence of Empire

Although he celebrates *kokumin* as if the population in colonial Korea had become equal members of the community, Yasuda could not conceal his deeply rooted imperial unconscious. Here it is crucial to analyze his rhetoric of irony, a hallmark of Yasuda Yojurō’s style. This sort of ambiguous rhetoric represents his version of “Romantic irony.” As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Yasuda adopted the notion of Romantic irony first and foremost from German romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel described Romantic irony as “permanent parabasis,” which Paul de Man explained as “the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register.”¹⁹¹ It is a form of self-reflection in which the writer doubles itself as the main narrator and a “buffo” who interrupts and undoes what the former is saying. In practice, it can take a number of forms. For instance, de Man also relates it to another rhetoric called “anacoluthon,” which means “a break in the syntactical expectations of the pattern.”¹⁹² Yet, I do not mean that Romantic irony is a form of conventional rhetoric, as de Man, along with Schlegel, pointed out that it is not a rhetoric in the limited sense of a sentence pattern, but a deep tropic structure. Nevertheless, as long as it is a form of writing, it would still need to be practiced in a manner that is

¹⁹¹ Paul de Man, “The Concept of Irony” in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.

¹⁹² Ibid.

identifiable as such. How, then, is Romantic irony as parabasis identifiable in this specific case? How is it disrupting the main narrative line?

Here is Yasuda's problematic sentence again: "*When in its two thousand years was there ever a day when Korea became a truly independent country?*" As a rhetorical question, this quote naturally anticipates a negative answer. Therefore, it says that there was no independence of Korea. Yet, the sentence only negates independence in a *past* history. In fact, the passage prior to this quote suggests that the "status of Korea" has improved. This may be said to represent a sort of "anacoluthon," i.e., "a break in the syntactical expectations of the pattern." If this is the case, Yasuda does imply as a second meaning, that the present Korea has now become an independent country. However, this would contradict what he has just said in the previous paragraph: independence was "nothing but a mere theoretical notion based on the past old regime." Here we can see a profound ambivalence, if not a contradiction. This is precisely why he has to say "Or," to rephrase his sentence. He says: "*Or, was there ever a day in which the land and people of Korea emerged as a road of world historical intercourse such as we see in the current form of military and logistic base?*" This is the very moment in which Yasuda the "buffo" intervenes in his main narrative. While he may seem to be just paraphrasing the previous sentence, he is actually saying something completely different. Now he insists as if the "military and logistic base" would mean real "independence." This is the modified new meaning of "independence." After all, he is saying that Korea can be a "truly independent country," only by being incorporated into Japanese empire—this is nothing but "semi-independence," "independent but not quite."

In this way, Yasuda as the main narrator in his rhetorical question gives rise to the expectation that he negates the "independence," but he does imply a present independence, albeit implicitly. Yet Yasuda the buffo further undoes this evocation by

saying “Or.” In so doing, however, his rhetoric not only suspends the phrase “independence,” but splits its literal meaning to create its simulacrum. The “independence” he evokes in the passage turns out to be no more than “semi-independence,” which he in fact employed in the essay, “Impressions of Korea.” Nevertheless, he cannot negate independence outright, precisely because without evoking some sense of “independence,” the empire cannot mobilize the colonized.

Furthermore, however, the almost scandalous ambivalence would be concealed, rather than overcome, by the movement of the uneven oneness of *kokumin* towards the continent. I claim this represents the *Romantic* moment in his rhetoric that points to a certain open-ended universality or infinity. Although de Man claimed that irony as *permanent* parabasis destroys a system of narrative or history, Yasuda’s version, I argue, serves for romantic world history because it enables a history in which the empire emerges out of constant negation of particularities, that is to say ethnic nationalisms. What Schlegel called “romantic poetry” as “progressive, universal poetry” should be taken at its face value here as something that has affinities with empire.

At the same time, however, I am not saying that this irony is reducible to Yasuda’s intentional operation. Instead, I am claiming that the rhetorical structure of irony was not confined to Yasuda’s rhetoric, but rather corresponded to the “objective” structure of Japanese imperialism. Significantly, this is the very question that Walter Benjamin had in mind in *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*. He claimed that irony as the “absolute form” is not a mere subjective phenomenon, but represents an objective idea of art. Formal irony is not “an intentional demeanor of the author.” He continues:

It cannot be understood in the usual manner as an index of a subjective boundlessness, but must be appreciated as an objective moment in the work itself. It presents a paradoxical venture: through demolition to continue

building on the formation, to demonstrate in the work itself its relationship to the idea.¹⁹³

Through demolition of a visible work, that is, through “the storm blast that raises the curtain on the transcendental order of art,” irony opens up “the realm of the invisible work,” i.e., the “indestructible” idea of art.¹⁹⁴ To be sure, Benjamin’s discussion of Romantic irony belongs to a different register than my argument that critically addresses the political function of irony for empire and, conversely, the ironic nature of empire itself. But the movement of irony that Benjamin describes, I claim, is suitable to illuminate that of empire. If this is the case, one might be tempted to compare empire with the work of art that is universal, invisible, and indestructible. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Yasuda described a work as a “lie”: “the lie of a work, a lie that is not false.” If there is any validity to this analogy, one would be able to say that empire as the work is a “lie.” Yasuda’s irony then can be interpreted as seeking to create the empire as a lie: the lie of an empire, a lie that is not false.

Or rather, following Winfried Menninghaus, one might be able to say, more straightforwardly, that the Romantic theory of absolute self-reflection undermines the very distinction between subjective and objective. If so, it becomes possible to argue that this Romantic irony mirrored, and was mirrored by, the discourse of Japanese empire. In fact, the rhetoric of Romantic world history “reflected”—in its reciprocal sense—the Japan’s colonial policy of *kōminka* in that ambivalence of semi-independence was displaced and replaced by expansion and mere anticipation of the beyond, that is, the continent. What is cunning about this political and rhetorical

¹⁹³ Walter Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, trans. David Lachterman, Howard Eiland, and Ian Balfour in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 165.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 164-5.

structure is that it implicates the colonized in what I call the semi-independent peninsula-bridge regime of Japanese imperialism.

The Genesis of *Kokumin* as an Imperial Signifier

At the same time, however, Yasuda's encounter with the colonial intellectuals in Keijō affected his own national identification. Although he sought to contain the ambivalence inherent in this relationship by appealing to the imperial temporality of world history and the trope of the peninsula, he could not ignore what he called the "essential something" in Hyun Yong Sup's interrogating address to the colonizer. Precisely because Hyun reflected and repeated the universalistic claim of the Japanese empire, Yasuda was forced to alter the signification of what is called "Japan." In other words, the ambivalence of "independent but not quite" is not confined to the colonized, but also inevitably comes back to haunt the colonizers.

Here let us return to the 1938 essay, "Impressions of Korea." The key question I am asking here is how a national identification is made possible and what happens when the colonized seeks to identify with the colonizer or, better yet, its nation as the ultimate object of identification. To this end, it is important to see how Yasuda described the Japanism of Hyun and others who had converted from leftist movements as follows:

After all modern thought had lost its ideals and faced disillusionment, the sole thing that appeared as ideal was Japanism, that is to say, the "national polity" (「国体」, *kokutai*) as such of "Japan."¹⁹⁵

First of all, this discovery of Japan by Korean Japanists, in fact, represented a parallel psychological process to converted leftists in Japan. This was precisely the experience of the members of the Japanese Romantics such as Kamei Katsuichirō and Hayashi

¹⁹⁵ Yasuda, "Chōsen no inshō," 52.

Fusao. Therefore, Yasuda's passage does not only refer to the colonized, but holds true for the colonizers. That is to say, it represents a quite common pattern of conversion to nationalism. Moreover, in spite of Yasuda's apparent conviction that the supreme Japanese essence goes beyond "modern thought," such a strong sense of nationhood does not seem to be especially unique to "Japanese nationality." On the contrary, this sentiment describes a quite common element in any nationalist narrative. His remark then can, and should, be understood as referring to a phenomenon that doubtlessly describes the national identification process in general. If this is the case, this psychological structure of conversion as such is hardly particular to the Japanese nationality.

Yasuda himself might have noticed such commonality and generalizability of nationalism. In fact, Yasuda put quotation marks around "Japan" and the "national polity." Obviously, he was not unaware that these signs, by being used by those new *kokumin*, were now no longer the same as what they used to signify. The designation of "Japan" was different in its extension from what most Japanists in Japan proper meant. This was the actual reality of the "world historical," multi-ethnic empire, as he described:

...it was finally demonstrated that the culture that Japan transferred to the peninsula was not only the Western clothing and buildings, but indeed Japanese spiritual culture. Its appearance might be minute yet. It must be nurtured further. This will mean a challenge to the universal (*sekai teki*) Japanese spirit.¹⁹⁶

This new "Japan" has now become worldly and universalized with its spirit and culture transmitted to its colonies. It was in this context that he made the following remark I have already quoted: "many of the people of the peninsula have understood the world and Japan in world history, apparently obtaining their self-awareness of

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 50-1.

being Japanese from that of having been Japanese.” Yasuda, as it turns out, really meant it.

Thus, not only “Japan,” but also the “Japanese” must be put in quotation marks.¹⁹⁷ The latter could never be ethnically determined. Significantly enough, the sovereign figure of Japanese nationality, i.e., *tennō* or the emperor was not exempted from the effect of de-ethnicization. Yasuda narrates the stories that were circulating among the common people, seemingly suggesting that the anecdotes were somehow empowering for them.

A driver from the peninsula wanted to tell us the legend that the Japanese imperial household has a blood relation with the kings who first developed Korea; also, in the South, they said that the people of Silla belong to the same tribe (*shuzoku*) as the Japanese. This is what we believe, too. The way they told us the legends had something different from servility and subservience.¹⁹⁸

In this passage, it may seem somewhat vague here whether or not he affirmed that the Japanese emperors had a blood relation with Koreans, but Yasuda, in another travelogue on Korea, did acknowledge that the mother of the emperor Kanmu, who inaugurated the Heian court, was a descendant from Baekje’s monarchical family.

Meanwhile, Yasuda carefully avoided using the phrase “*Chōsenjin*” (Koreans) in the essay “Impressions of Korea.” Most of the cases in which the word appears are either employed by Hyun himself or refer to the Korean people before the Japanist movements. Instead, Yasuda favorably used “*hantōjin*” or the “peninsular people,” as I have already discussed. To be sure, Yasuda, on the one hand, would never abandon the hierarchy between the Japanese and the Koreans, insisting on the supremacy of the Japanese tradition of culture over that of the Koreans; the difference between both ethnic groups is retained primarily in the realm of art and culture. On the other, in the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹⁸ Yasuda, “Fuyo,” 42.

narrative of world history, he was pleased with the formation of the new Japan, emphasizing that the Japanese spirit was transmitted to the people in colonial Korea. Here the figure of *kokumin* played the crucial role. It was *kokumin* that both enabled and was created by “Japan and Korea as a single body.” Thus, the new “Japanese” in quotation marks could never represent a biological racism. In fact, he never subscribed to the “pure blood” theory, but rather presupposed the “mixed nation” theory.¹⁹⁹ In addition, it is noteworthy that Yasuda continued to support the latter theory into the postwar.²⁰⁰

Yasuda’s use of the signs as put in quotation marks—“Japan,” “Japanese,” the “national polity”—suggests that “*kokumin*” or the people, as articulated in the contact zone, does not refer to any fixed entity that is determined by the past history, which Homi Bhabha called “pedagogical object,” but are exposed to the continual process and movement of signification as the “performance of narrative, its enunciatory ‘present’ marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign.”²⁰¹ That is to say, a national identification as based on the agency of the subject of enunciation is not only susceptible to the play of difference in signification, but always already split between the double time of the “pedagogical” and the performative. At the same time, however, the figure of *kokumin* would have been impossible without the desperate yet

¹⁹⁹ In his study on the myth of Japan as a homogeneous nation, Oguma Eiji mentioned Yasuda’s remark, situating it within the wartime debate between the pure blood theory and the mixed nation theory. See Eiji Oguma, *A Genealogy of ‘Japanese’ Self-Images*, trans. David Askew (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2002), 213. Oguma, however, does not thematically analyze Yasuda’s conception of the “nation” in its complexity and hybridity.

²⁰⁰ In his memoir on the prewar literary activity of the Japanese Romantics, published in 1969, Yasuda makes a remark to this effect. Citing Korea, China and India for the sources of Japanese culture, Yasuda clearly states: “While Japan created ‘Japanese’ by mixing several heterogeneous *minzoku*, it inherited and preserved every culture and civilization (*bunka bunbutsu*) as it was at the time it was generated.” Yasuda Yojūrō, *Nihon romanha no jidai* [The time of the Japanese Romantics] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshu*, vol. 36 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1988), 171. 数個の異種民族を混同して一つの「日本人」をつくった日本は、文化文物に於いては、そのすべてを、発生したままを伝世保存した。Interestingly enough, he puts a quotation marks to the “Japanese.”

²⁰¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 211.

disrupting practice of identification by the “Japanists” in Korea. If this is the case, this articulation of the national signs—*Nihon*, *Chōsenjin*, *kokumin*, *minzoku*, and so forth—was made possible through the colonial encounter in the periphery—*hashi*—between Yasuda and the Koreans. Bhabha also describes such a periphery as “temporality of ‘in-between’” and “a liminal signifying space.”²⁰² “The boundary,” thus Bhabha says, “that marks the nation’s selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous.”²⁰³ This statement on “dissemi-nation,” however, must also be read as describing how the people constitutes itself as a hybrid and also *imperial* nation at the boundary. This is, I argue, what the genesis of *kokumin* at the periphery suggests.

To be sure, it would be easy to dismiss the efforts of the colonized subjects as acts of “collaboration” with Japanese colonial rule, arguing that the *kokumin* notion was a mere instrument for mobilizing the colonial population on the part of the governor-general’s office. I argue, however, that it is not only fairer, but more productive, to detect within this complicity certain critical stakes, on the part of the Japanists such as Hyun Yong Sup. Through their discursive strategy, I claim, they sought to generalize, de-ethnicize, and hybridize the “Japanese.”

Hyun Yong Sup and the Doubling of Imperial Irony

Here let us take a look at Hyun Yong Sup to see the critical political stakes. In his essay, “‘Japan and Korea as a Single Body’ (*naisen ittai*) and the Question of the Individual Character (個性, *kosei*) of the Koreans,” published in March 1940, Hyun argued for “*tettei naisen ittai*” or “Japan and Korea as a complete single body,”

²⁰² Ibid., 212.

²⁰³ Ibid.

emphasizing the necessity of participating in the empire.²⁰⁴ It is true that he was not only involved in Japanese colonialism, but also denied Korean cultural “identity” by notoriously advocating the abolition of the Korean language.²⁰⁵ As a matter of fact, however, Hyun was far from simply celebrating Japanese colonial rule. I claim that it is important to take a serious look at potentially critical aspects of his discussions, which have not been paid much attention.²⁰⁶ As I show, he was committed to a certain universalism and that this was the very reason why he endorsed Japanese empire.²⁰⁷ I will interpret Hyun’s strategy as overcoming the colonial structure of discrimination

²⁰⁴ Hyun Yong Sup, “‘Naisen ittai’ to Chōsenjin no kosei mondai” [Japan and Korea as a single body and the question of the individual character of the Koreans], Japanese translation by Cho Kyung Hi, in *Quadrante*, vol 7 (March 2005), 320-6.

²⁰⁵ Here I would like to make myself clear about my critical intention in discussing Hyun. I do not mean to endorse his views, especially about the abolition of the language. I am not trying to suggest either that the example of Hyun Yong Sup would provide any legitimacy for Japanese colonial rule. There is no question about that. I argue, however, that it is important to understand Hyun’s logic, because, first of all, it shows how empire implicates and mobilizes the colonized. Second, his argument for the complete unity contained certain critical intention towards the empire that is worth analyzing.

²⁰⁶ According to Choi Jinseok, scholars such as Miyata Setsuko and Lee Sung-Yup discussed Hyun’s logic of “Japan and Korea as a complete single body.” Miyata argues that Hyun negated *minzoku* because he was motivated by his strong desire to “escape from discrimination” (*sabetsu kara no dasshutsu*) caused by ethnic difference. Lee also points out that Hyun sought for liberation as “individuals who were registered as Korean” (*Chōsen seki no kojīn*). Choi himself claims that Hyun “pursued a vertical relationship beyond the framework of *minzoku* under the progressive thought (*kakushin shisō*) of new Japanism that did not allow any discrimination except for that between the imperial household and the people.” See Choi, “Shiryō to shōgen II. Nitchū sensō ki Chōsen chishikijin no naisen ittai ron. Shiryō kaidai,” 297-300; the last quote from Choi on 300. In addition, Oguma Eiji makes an important point about Hyun Yong Sup in the context of the *kōminka* period: it is true that he supported the Japanese colonial policy of *naisen ittai* that relativized the *minzoku* concept, but Hyun’s collaboration was first and foremost motivated by his desire for progress and modernization that would overcome the Korean backwardness and improve women’s social status. See Oguma Eiji, *Nihonjin no kyōkai* [The boundary of Japanese] (Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 1998), 417-34. All these points are surely important, but it seems that they do not pay much attention to what I would like to describe as the excessive nature of Hyun’s radical humanism.

²⁰⁷ As for the universalistic aspect of Hyun Yong Sup, see Hwang Ho-duk (黃鎬德), “国語와 朝鮮語 사이、内鮮語의 존재론” [The colonized language(s) in the Great Co-Prosperity Sphere, Korean language discourse under the Japanese rule: two roads of the colonized intellectual, Hyun Young-sub and Kim Sa-ryang] in 大東文化研究 [Studies in the Eastern culture], no. 58, (2007), 135-182, esp. 151-158. In this essay, Hwang compares Hyun Yong Sup and the writer Kim Saryang (金史良) as two different forms of linguistic strategy in the colonial situation. Hwang argues that Hyun was motivated by a universalistic and rationalistic desire for phonocentrism, which privileged the alphabets and implicitly suggested abolishing Japanese mixed writing system. In this respect, Hyun clearly aimed to transcend Japanese culture. Remarkably, Hwang also briefly mentions Yasuda’s essay “Impression of Korea” and his encounter with Hyun. I would like to thank Yi Youngjae for letting me know about Hwang’s article and summarizing his argument for me.

and segregation by appealing to the very promise of universality. Here I will detect his hidden critical agenda of radical humanism. In so doing, I will also suggest how irony, inscribed in the mechanism of empire, reveals its real doubling effects.

Hyun begins his essay by debating with proponents of so-called “*kyōwa teki naisen ittai*” or Japan and Korea as a cooperative single body. As I have discussed, this strategy was advocated by those activists and intellectuals who sought to secure relative autonomy of the Korean *minzoku* within the empire. Hyun describes it as a “friendly” attitude that only “shakes hands” with Japanese.²⁰⁸ He disagrees with them, because they still regard Koreans and Japanese as two distinct *minzoku*. Instead, he insists on the “complete singly body,” openly supporting the governor-general Minami Jirō’s problematic statement saying that Japanese and Koreans must “ultimately become one in terms of everything, from blood to shape to body and soul.”²⁰⁹ When looking at this sort of statement, one might be tempted to denounce Hyun as having completely submitted to the colonial regime.

I argue, however, that there are two mutually related agendas implied in this polemic. One is his polemic with the other Korean activists in terms of the *minzoku* notion, and another is his implicit criticism of the Japanese empire.

First, Hyun seeks to undermine the *minzoku* concept by pursuing, at least theoretically, the ultimate fusion of different *minzoku*, including, but not limited to, Koreans and Japanese. He criticizes *kyōwa teki naisen ittai* by projecting a quite radical future of human history. He first argues that Koreans and Japanese will be gradually unified through both cultural exchange and marriage. Importantly enough, the Japanese *minzoku* itself, he points out, is a product of long-term miscegenation of heterogeneous *minzoku*. In this respect, Hyun shared the same view with Yasuda

²⁰⁸ Hyun, “‘Naisen ittai’ to Chōsenjin no kosei mondai,” 320.

²⁰⁹ Minami’s statement paraphrased in *ibid.*

Yojūrō who believed in the mixed nation theory. However, Hyun further claims that the “direction of development of the humanity” lies in fusion and mixing of *minzoku*.²¹⁰ Once Koreans and Japanese are unified, they will mix with Chinese, and then with Indians. And ultimately, Asians and Europeans will be unified. “I see Asian and European worlds as non-duality,” he maintains. “The world is one. The whole world must become one *minzoku*.”²¹¹ If there is only one large *minzoku* in the world, it would not make any more sense to talk about *minzoku*. The term would mean the same thing as the “humanity.” Hence, Hyun is seeking to undermine *minzoku* by pushing it to its extreme possibility. To be sure, this line of argument that seeks to relativize ethnic difference was not contrary to, but rather quite affine to Japanese colonial discourse at the time of the *kōminka* period. However, Hyun’s discussion was distinctive in that it was based on a radical, potentially subversive standpoint.

In spite of its perplexing appearance, he was not endorsing Japanese colonial regime as it is. Rather, he was seeking, I claim, to exceed it precisely by appealing to its promised ideals. What makes his strategy possible is the premise, or rather postulate, that Japan represented *sekaisei* or universality. Comparing it with other global movements such as Christianity and Communism, he insisted on the spiritual and even religious character of the Japanese empire. “The Japanese spirit never represents ethnic nationalism (*minzoku shugi*), but is a God-centered faith that is of the same type as Christianity.”²¹² He then describes “Japanese emperor” as the “symbol of God.” What is interesting is the fact that he calls the emperor not as the living deity, but as the symbol of God. This would not only differ from the official doctrine of *kokutai* in the State Shinto, but he conceives of “God” itself as something higher than the emperor, if not a transcendent deity. In this theological hyperbole, he not only

²¹⁰ Ibid., 325.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 322.

clearly denies ethnic particularism to Japan, but goes beyond the existing Japanese nation-state. He performs a confession of faith, as it were:

I believe that the peninsular people can become perfect Japanese *minzoku*, and that peoples all over the world can form one *minzoku* and one state. Although this is a modern fantasy (*kūsō*), it will come true when humanity has a thorough faith in God. The time will come when *genus humanum* becomes one big family. This is expressed by the Divine Rescript of the Eight Worlds under One Roof.²¹³

This statement may sound like a fanatic ideology of a global imperial and military expansion. But he deliberately propose it as a utopian ideal, since he describes it as a “fantasy.” This is primarily a radical act of confession addressed to the colonizer who promised to realize through the *naisen ittai* policy a true unity and equality of both peoples. Hyun’s performance, moreover, reflects and repeats, rather than merely represents, the universal claim of the Japanese empire in an excessive and hyperbolic manner that modifies and remolds what it is reflecting. In so doing, he demanded, rather than pleaded, that this ideal be realized. Or rather, under the disguise of loyal imitation, he pressured the colonizer and even interrogated whether or not the Japanese were willing and able to carry out this universal mission.

Here one might see Hyun’s version of ironic revolt that transforms the official narrative. In this respect, Hyun’s strategy might represent a case of what Homi Bhabha called “colonial mimicry.” Bhabha describes this ironic ambivalence as the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*.²¹⁴ “[I]n order to be effective,” he continues, “mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”²¹⁵ While the excessive character of mimicry does apply to Hyun’s performance, his aspiration does not seem to stop at

²¹³ Ibid., 323.

²¹⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122. Italic in the original.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

becoming a subject of partial presence or “metonymy of presence.”²¹⁶ Instead, Hyun seems to pursue full presence by seeking to eliminate and erase any particular ethnic characteristics. It is certainly possible to argue that this desire is precisely an effect of the metonymic being of the colonized. “The desire,” Bhabha says, “to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry—through a process of writing and repetition—is the final irony of partial representation.”²¹⁷ Nevertheless, Hyun’s attempt at radical imitation and identification boldly intends towards a moment that exceeds the universality that the colonizers are supposed to represent. In fact, Hyun did not idealize the actual Japanese as it was, but was committed to a much higher dimension called *genus humanum*, thereby demanding the colonizer to both obey and realize these ideals. This can be called radical humanism. Here it might be possible to find a trace of his earlier anarchism, which he officially abandoned. But it is also true that this form of universalism was made possible by his commitment to the religious and utopian dimensions.

Hyun’s universalism contained profound ambivalence, which introduced a certain difference. One might observe that modern Japan faced a similar situation vis-à-vis the so-called “West” as the representative of the universal. It was Japanese philosophers, especially the Kyoto School, who conceptualized their version of philosophical humanism in terms of Japan’s “world historical” standpoint which is a narrative based on broadly Hegelian dialectics between master and slave. By contrast, Hyun Yong Sup, under the conditions in which an openly political, dialectical struggle was forbidden, had to appeal to a strategy that secretly disrupts the dominant narrative by faithfully or rather hyperbolically imitating it. In this respect, one might identify Hyun’s project as pursuing a line between master-slave dialectics and colonial

²¹⁶ Ibid., 128.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 126.

mimicry. In this sense, too, Hyun reflected, repeated and doubled Japanese imperial universalism by revealing that it was itself a double.²¹⁸

Nevertheless, or precisely because of this, his strategy of radical humanism was not free from risks and problems. First of all, as a result of negating particularities, Hyun insisted that the peninsular people must abandon their ethnic identity, including the Korean customs and their language. Retaining their ethnic language was not essential, he says, because, even if they use different signifiers, for example, “*maze gohan*” for “*bibim pap*,” the referent would have the same “taste.”²¹⁹ Instead, he advised his fellows to universalize and modernize their entire way of life. This meant assimilating the essence of spiritual and material cultures represented by Japan.

You will have the qualification of a Japanese *kokumin* in a true sense, only by assimilating the culture of Western science and technology and the religions of Buddhism and Christianity, that is to say, all of the global culture. Modern Japan will synthesize the entire global culture and create a new culture.²²⁰

Interestingly enough, he employs the term *kokumin* here. This is one of the few entries of the word in this essay, which aims to launch a polemic against the proponents of the *minzoku* concept. When he speaks of the “qualification of a Japanese *kokumin* in a true sense,” it may appear that *kokumin* is a sort of a status symbol for being Japanese. Yet, here again, he does not consider it to be any qualities or properties that are particular to the Japanese nation. Rather, he defines it as a membership for those who have the

²¹⁸ At the same time, however, one might also hear in Hyun’s notion of *genus humanus* an echo of the discussion by the Kyoto philosopher Tanabe Hajime who developed a very similar idea of human universality called 類 or “genus.” In his “logic of species,” he claimed that individuals (個) can be universal and thus belong to the ideal state, by negating their particular identity and cultural values called 種 or “species.” Naoki Sakai compellingly argued that Tanabe’s imperial universalism was most appealing to those marginalized subjects who suffer from the structure of the colonial rule and discrimination but who wish to be the first-class citizens of the imperial nation. See Naoki Sakai, “Subject and Substratum: On Japanese Imperial Nationalism,” *Cultural Studies*, 14 (3/4) (2000), 462-530.

²¹⁹ Here one might be tempted to say that his argument points to another important dimension of *hashi*, that is, “chopsticks,” which my essay could not address but that is fundamental to understanding political economy of the colonial rule.

²²⁰ Ibid., 325.

capacity to assimilate, develop, and create global culture and civilization. In other words, *kokumin* is but a form that is filled with universal contents of the human development. He claims that the identity of individual Koreans or *kosei* would prosper here. This is what he meant by the “Japanese who have universality (*sekaisei*),” which include Koreans.²²¹ In this sense, he was an individualist who believed in modernity. Therefore, Hyun never dismissed the *kosei* of individual Koreans, but tried to elevate it to the level of a world culture, albeit within the confines of the Japanese empire.

Thus, he claims,

Not the language, but the special technology of the peninsular people will be our uniqueness. Even our customs and family system are not important aspects of *kosei*. Only such technology and thought that the people in Japan proper and Manchuria are not capable of are the aspects of *kosei* we should be proud of.²²²

While this passage betrays Hyun’s hidden agenda to exceed Japanese in the future, he could not conceal his sense of superiority over other Asians here. “The peninsular people,” he maintains, “have a grave responsibility: they have more awareness and do more practice of the Japanese spirit than the people in Manchukuo and the Chinese, and therefore, assume the mission for the next global advancement of the Japanese spirit in the future.”²²³

In this way, Hyun’s radical humanism, which desperately sought to overcome discrimination, was not exempt from a hierarchical thinking. On the one hand, this sort of order of ranking was undoubtedly imposed on him by the imperial structure of repression. If he advocated modernization through imperialization, it means that he had to accept the rules of the game designed by the metropole, under which the colonized nations had to compete with each other. On the other hand, however, his argument implied that the contemporary Japanese happened to be superior, not

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., 324.

²²³ Ibid.

because of being native Japanese, nor even because of the hegemony of empire, but merely as a result of their stage of development. If this is the case, it was precisely his deep-rooted faith in, and valorization of, universal modernity that made him yield to authority and hierarchy, thereby supporting and collaborating with the colonial regime.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed Yasuda Yojūrō's colonial Romanticism, focusing on his narrative of "world history" in his travelogues on colonial Korea. I demonstrated how his Romanticism was inherently motivated by the idea of world history. In this narrative, the rhetoric of Romantic irony played a central role. By negating, or better yet suspending, "independence" or separation of Koreans, it worked to integrate this colonial population into universal but uneven *kokumin* thereby creating continuity with empire, which I described as "empire as a lie," using Yasuda's phrase. That is to say, irony proved to be constitutive of imperial world history, rather than destroy its narrative.

In this way, the Korean peninsula became Japan's "bridge" to the continent in this rhetorical scheme of romantic colonialism. I am not merely using the term "bridge" as a simple metaphor in a spatial and physical sense. Rather, the figure of "bridge" in Yasuda is deeply associated with Romantic irony, because irony not only suspends meaning, but always intends towards somewhere else or the beyond as the reverse side of the negation. This is why in Yasuda, the "bridge" served as a privileged figure that symbolizes the Romantic irony in the first place. Precisely for this reason, the trope motivated his romantic imperialism at a profound level.

I would like to conclude by describing how the figure of *hashi* in its polysemic elements serves as an allegory for the structure and movement of Yasuda's romantic world history. First, Yasuda's world history was characterized as a civilizational

mission that is vertical or hierarchical in nature. This moment is represented by *hashi* as a “ladder” of civilization. Another, closely related aspect of his world history is the figure of *kōtsūro*, or “the road of intercourse,” as the horizontal expansion. This means for imperial expansion would correspond to another *hashi* as “bridge” or “boat” to the continent. More specifically, the “military and logistic base” can be regarded as one concrete instance of the second *hashi*. In this sense, Korea for Yasuda was Japan’s bridge to the continent, which I call a peninsular-bridge regime of Japanese colonialism.

However, the bridge not only allowed the imperial movement back and forth between Japan and the continent, but was itself a margin or periphery of the empire. As such a marginal but also in-between place, it exposed Yasuda to the encounter with the colonial intellectuals such as Hyun Yong Sup. This moment is figured in a third dimension of *hashi*, which I call the “periphery as the site of encounter.”

In this way, the threefold trope of *hashi* articulates the internally heterogeneous structure of Yasuda’s imperial project. In other words, the peninsula-bridge regime and its progressive narrative of world history were confronted with and interrogated by the performative acts of radical identification at the margin of empire. Such present encounter at the periphery gave rise to the figure of *kokumin* that is constituted by Yasuda’s ironizing on the one hand, and the colonial mimesis, on the other. This means, however, that *kokumin* thus produced is not only heterogeneous and ambivalent, but always already imperial. To be sure, the bridge as an in-between place would be crossed over while being mobilized and implicated in the regime of imperial expansion. But, by exposing Yasuda to these colonial others, the bridge as an irony undermined self-identity of “Japan” and “Japanese.” The Korean peninsula was Yasuda’s “Japanese bridge” in all these senses.

CHAPTER 4

Antinomies of Total War²²⁴

In the previous chapters, I have discussed Yasuda Yojūrō and his notion of Romantic world history. I especially focused on how Romantic irony as continual alternation and reflection effectively undermined binary oppositions and suspended ethnic and gender identities. In so doing, I have shown that irony was at play in the discourse of world history on both sides of the colonizer and the colonized, which also suggests that ironic ambivalence was inherent and inscribed in the imperial formation. Ambivalence implies certain tensions, and the empire was always filled with tensions. In this concluding chapter, I will examine another, more explicit form in which the internal tensions of the empire and its world history manifested itself, that is to say, war. Here I will thematize the wartime discussions of “world history” by the Kyoto School of philosophy and seek to show how their conception of war as “total war” revealed the essential tensions of imperial world history. Just like Yasuda described “war and peace” as “irony,” the Kyoto scholars, too, sought to undermine the distinction between what is war and what is not.

At a critical time in the Asia Pacific war, the second generation of the Kyoto School of philosophy engaged in a discourse on war as represented in *Sekai-shiteki tachiba to Nihon* (The World Historical Standpoint and Japan).²²⁵ This book consists

²²⁴ "Antinomies of Total War," from *positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, Vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 97-125. Copyright 2009, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

²²⁵ Kōsaka Masaaki, Suzuki Shigetaka, Nishitani Keiji, and Kōyama Iwao, *Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon* [The world historical standpoint and Japan] (Tokyo: Chūōkōron, 1943). The three roundtable discussions are “Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon” [The world historical standpoint and Japan], *Chūōkōron* (January 1942):159–92; “Tōa kyōeiken no rinrisei to rekis-hisei” [The ethicality and historicity of the East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere], *Chūōkōron* (April 1942): 120–61; and “Sōryokusen no tetsugaku” [The philosophy of total war], *Chūōkōron* (January 1942):54-112. All citations in this article are from the original journal transcripts. References to the third roundtable are cited by page number in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are by the author.

of three roundtable discussions organized by Kōsaka Masaaki, Nishitani Keiji, and Kōyama Iwao — all of whom had studied with Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime at Kyoto Imperial University — as well as the historian Suzuki Shigetaka. These discussions aimed to legitimate Japan's war efforts through a “philosophy of world history.” The last session was titled “The Philosophy of Total War”; here the participants provided a philosophical determination of the current warfare as “total war.”

Today's situation sheds new light on these discussions because we are once again confronted with the spectacle of war. In *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt claim that the current “war on terrorism” is a global civil war taking place within the so-called empire.²²⁶ War has now ceased to be an exceptional phenomenon and has become general and permanent. This global war has no boundaries, spatial or temporal, nullifying the traditional distinctions between war and other areas of social life. It has thus come to have an “absolute, ontological character,” that is, “biopower,” which is “a form of rule aimed not only at controlling the population but producing and reproducing all aspects of social life.”²²⁷

Despite certain differences, these descriptions are surprisingly similar to the discourse of total war as developed by the Kyoto School. As such, a reexamination of the Japanese discourse on total war should help historicize the current discourse on war. In my view, the significance of the Kyoto School's discussions consisted in the fact that their philosophical language systematically developed the implications of total war to the limit thereby revealing its internal contradictions.

²²⁶ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

²²⁷ Ibid., 13.

In the following, I first critically examine the current debates on this topic, touching in particular on newly discovered and published documents attesting to the wartime collaboration of the Kyoto School with the Japanese Navy. I then analyze how the Kyoto School conceived of the notion of total war and sought to philosophize the Asia-Pacific war in its terms. In reference to previous theories of war as discussed by the Kyoto School, I call attention to both the novelty and the hyperbolic nature of total war, laying out the particular issues involved in this problematic. Here it is crucial to show that each aspect of total war was haunted by a specific kind of self-contradiction that I call *antinomy*. Specifically, I focus on the temporal aspects of this kind of war, its beginning and end, in order to reveal how the Kyoto School philosophers negotiated their own historical present.

The Kyoto School's Wartime Involvement

The symposium “Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon” (The World Historical Standpoint and Japan), together with another roundtable discussion, “Kindai no chōkoku” (“Overcoming Modernity”), has long been criticized in terms of the Kyoto School’s involvement in the war.²²⁸ However, there have recently appeared two works in a sort of collaborative effort on the part of American and Japanese scholars that seek to

²²⁸ “Kindai no chōkoku” was organized by the Bungakkai (Literary World) group in the summer of 1942 and appears in book form in Kawakami Tetsutarō et al., *Kindai no chōkoku* (Overcoming Modernity), ed. Matsumoto Kenichi (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1979). Nishitani Keiji and Suzuki Shigetaka also participated in this symposium, which lends strength to the post-war critic and China scholar Takeuchi Yoshimi's proposal to treat these symposia as intimately connected with one another. See here Takeuchi's 1959 essay “Kindai no chōkoku,” in *ibid.*, 273–341 (translated as “Overcoming Modernity” in *What Is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, trans. and ed. Richard F. Calichman [New York: Columbia University Press, 2005], 103–47). While recognizing the importance of the task of “overcoming modernity,” Takeuchi points out that both conferences failed to question or resolve the aporia that “the Greater East Asian War was at once a war of colonial invasion and a war against imperialism” (124). Takeuchi also renders a strongly negative judgment against the Kyoto School philosophers: “The war itself began as an attempt to ‘conceal this nature of invasion.’ It is an overestimation of the Kyoto School to claim that its dogmatism was able to conceal it. The Kyoto School did not produce war and fascist ideology; they merely expounded official thought, or perhaps they interpreted it” (134).

rehabilitate the school's wartime commitment as such. These works are Ōhashi Ryōsuke's *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun: Shin shiryō "Ōshima memo" wo megutte* (The Kyoto School and the Japanese Navy: On the Newly Discovered "Ōshima Memorandum") and David Williams's *Defending Japan's Pacific War: The Kyoto School Philosophers and Post-White Power*.²²⁹

As the title of his book reveals, Ōhashi discovered and published the memoranda and records of the wartime "secret meetings" between the Kyoto School and the navy. From a critical standpoint, the memoranda serve as evidence of the Kyoto School's deep involvement in Japan's war effort. However, Ōhashi insists that the school's activities should be interpreted as "anti-regime cooperation with the war" (*hantaisei-teki na sensō kyōryoku*), "for these secret meetings did not so much 'assist' military rule as they were 'anti-regime' actions that tried to rectify its policies."²³⁰

Before examining this claim, let us briefly touch on the contents of the meetings. Ōshima Yasumasa had transcribed the discussions at these meetings and retained possession of the transcriptions long afterward. A disciple of Tanabe Hajime, Ōshima was an assistant at Kyoto Imperial University during the war and participated in the meetings as secretary. The meetings were secret because the cabinet was then under the rule of Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki of the army, and the army maintained very tense relations with the navy at the time. Kōyama Iwao represented the Kyoto School as the main coordinator of these meetings and was officially appointed as a commissioned researcher for the navy. Discussions were held based on the materials

²²⁹ Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun: Shin shiryō "Ōshima memo" wo megutte* [The Kyoto School and the Japanese Navy: On the Newly Discovered "Ōshima Memorandum"] (Tokyo: PHP, 2001); David Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War: The Kyoto School Philosophers and Post-White Power* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). Williams states in his introduction to this text (xviii) that, together with Ōhashi, he is currently preparing a translation of *Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon*.

²³⁰ Ōhashi, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*, 22. Apparently it was Takagi Sōkichi, an officer in the navy's research division, who first approached the Kyoto School thinkers to request that they meet for discussion.

provided by the navy, and the results were reported to the research division. In addition to the four participants of “The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan” symposium, the regular participants of these meetings included the philosopher Kimura Motomori and the scholar of Chinese history Miyazaki Ichisada. Significantly, even Tanabe attended several times.²³¹

Ōhashi’s reading of these new documents relies on Ōshima’s 1965 testimony about the Kyoto scholars’ wartime activities.²³² Ōshima explained the course and contents of this organization as follows: (1) “During the first stages, the theme [of these meetings] consisted in how to prevent the outbreak of war.” The *Chūōkōron* discussions were first organized with this secret aim in mind. Soon after the first session, however, war broke out. (2) The next topic then discussed concerned “how to favorably conclude the war as soon as possible through rational persuasion of the army.” To this end, attention focused on how to “overthrow” the Tōjō cabinet. (3) From the end of 1944 until Japan’s surrender in August 1945, the Kyoto School philosophers discussed how to prepare for the postwar situation, “as the secret information brought by the navy already made the defeat apparent.”²³³

However, major discrepancies exist between this testimony and the actual documents discovered by Ōhashi. First, the latter include only eighteen meetings from February 1942 until November 1943. This figure differs slightly from that given in

²³¹ At the ninth meeting, held on September 29, 1942, Tanabe delivered an important lecture clarifying the logic of the co-prosperity sphere. See *ibid.*, 227 – 44.

²³² Ōshima Yasumasa, “Daitōa sensō to Kyōto gakuha: Chishikijin no seiji sankā ni tsuite” [The Greater East Asian War and the Kyoto School: On the political participation of the intellectuals], in Nishida Kitarō et al., *Sekaiishi no riron* [The Theory of World History], ed. Mori Tetsurō (Kyoto: Tōeisha, 2000), 274–304 (first published in *Chūōkōron* [August 1965]). Horio Tsutomu provides a rereading of the *Chūōkōron* discussions based on this testimony. However, his interpretation lacks any critical perspective, describing the philosophers as genuine “nationalists” who acted “out of love for their country” in order to steer the war in a more rational and moral direction. See Horio, “The *Chūōkōron* Discussions, Their Background and Meaning,” in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1955), 289–315.

²³³ Ōshima “Daitōa sensō to Kyōto gakuha,” 282.

Ōshima's testimony. Given these dates, obviously these materials do not contain anything that would testify to the Kyoto School's prewar efforts to prevent the Pacific war. Second, the memoranda do not tell us much about any specific actions to overturn the Tōjō cabinet, yet the other documents that Ōhashi groups in the second category do include reference to the army. Clearly, the argument here is to ascribe responsibility for the war strictly to the army, thereby exonerating the navy.²³⁴ Third, the documents of the third category, which include miscellaneous materials, are not published in *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*. Ōhashi suggests that other related materials may exist that have yet to be found.²³⁵

Thus the value of Ōshima's memoranda needs to be critically reexamined as historical material. In addition, his 1965 essay, despite its importance, is very much a recollection from the postwar perspective. In fact, serious contradictions can be found between these intentions, as represented by Ōshima, and the secret wartime discussions.²³⁶ For these reasons, I view these materials as auxiliary documents in examining the Kyoto School's wartime symposia.

Despite these problems, however, Ōhashi reiterates Ōshima's narrative, insisting that the Kyoto School intended through this involvement to "rectify the course of the war of invasion" on the basis of its "philosophy of world history."²³⁷ Based on its intentions, Ōhashi tries to defend the school's problematic statements. If these philosophers employed in their discourse such official symbols as the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and "eight worlds under one roof" (*hakkō ichiu*), this was done strictly in order to change their meanings. Ōhashi describes this "tug-of-war

²³⁴ See Ōhashi, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*, 326–29.

²³⁵ Ibid., 16–20.

²³⁶ See note 265.

²³⁷ Ōhashi, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*, 24.

over meaning”²³⁸ through another contemporary keyword, *shisōsen* (“thought war”), which constituted one of the major topics discussed by the Kyoto School thinkers in their roundtable sessions.

Along with the philosophers’ intentions, Ōhashi emphasizes, the politico-intellectual context at the time must be considered. Specifically, one needs to focus on the various disagreements between the army and the navy, just as one must remember that these philosophers were vigorously attacked by such ultra-rightists as the Genri Nippon (Japan Principle) group of Minoda Muneki. With this in mind, Ōhashi states, “Any criticism [of the Kyoto School] on the basis of the horizon of meaning first established in the post-war period that ignores the [wartime] thought war must be described as a hermeneutic error.”²³⁹ However, Ōhashi’s understanding of hermeneutics appears somewhat dubious here. One must agree with Iwasaki Minoru’s criticism of Ōhashi: “This amounts to saying that hermeneutics involves reducing things to the past context of their meanings, which represents a reality that exists in and of itself.”²⁴⁰ There is little doubt that Ōhashi seeks to affirm the Kyoto School’s activities in order to rehabilitate them “just as they were.”

Apparently what motivates Ōhashi’s claim to vindicate the Kyoto School is the transferential relation with his mentors, including Nishitani Keiji, who expressed his resentment that “during the war we were struck on the cheek from the right; after the war we were struck on the cheek from the left.”²⁴¹ Ōhashi insists that postwar critics have judged the Kyoto School unfairly in an *ex post facto* manner, that is, without

²³⁸ Quoted in Ueda Shizuteru, “Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question,” in Heisig and Maraldo, *Rude Awakenings*, 90.

²³⁹ Ōhashi, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*, 25. Ōshima emphasizes that because of the roundtable discussions, the Kyoto School thinkers experienced greater suppression by the rightists and the army. The journal *Chōūkōron* was ultimately forced to shut down because of this pressure.

²⁴⁰ Iwasaki Minoru, “Sensō no shūji, sekaishi no kyōhaku” [The rhetoric of war and the coercions of world history], in *Sōryokusenka no chi to seido* [Knowledge and institutions under the total war], ed. Naoki Sakai et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002), 121.

²⁴¹ Quoted by Horio, “*Chōūkōron* Discussions,” 291.

sufficiently taking into account the political context at the time. This context was one in which the Kyoto School thinkers were in fact heroic, self-sacrificing, and antiregimist and worked hard to move Japan in a more reasonable direction. However, this view is problematic because, in its exclusive attention to the Kyoto School's relative change of positionality, it effectively obscures such important questions as what sort of regime these philosophers presupposed and what kind of ideas they proposed as alternatives within the regime. Moreover, by focusing solely on the so-called domestic thought war, Ōhashi simply ignores its international aspects. This exclusion results in a failure to question both the significance and the responsibility of the Kyoto School's wartime discourse from a global or "worldly" perspective.²⁴²

Ōhashi's overall reading strategy derives from his belief that those utterances made during the symposium that affirmed or even promoted the war regime were not meant literally but were in truth merely tactical or strategic. In short, he suggests that these philosophers' words and deeds should be regarded as irony. However, Ōhashi seems blind to the fact that with the disclosure of these secret meetings, it becomes all the more important to examine the public discussions. In the final analysis, it is through the *exoteric* rather than *esoteric* thought war that these scholars could influence the public.

Let us now turn to David Williams, Ōhashi's American counterpart. Interestingly, we can detect a symptomatic complicity between these two writers. As with Ōhashi, Williams does not conceal his "revisionist" desire to criticize the United States' so-called Pacific war orthodoxy, which holds that Japanese military expansion was wrong whereas the American war effort was necessary and morally justifiable. In

²⁴² To be fair, Ōhashi's earlier work provides a less ideological evaluation of the Kyoto School's entire project of overcoming modernity. Ōhashi points out that even the theories of technology developed by the school (as, for instance, those of Nishida) in its other writings were unable to comprehend this dangerous and uncanny dimension of technology. See Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *Nishida tetsugaku no sekai* [The world of Nishida philosophy] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1995), 164–66.

this context, he states, the Kyoto School in particular has been labeled as “fascist.” Taking these philosophers' wartime discourse at face value, Williams insists that despite Japan's defeat, they proposed and anticipated the formation of a “post-white” world in which western supremacy comes to an end. Provocative as this thesis may be, Williams's basic standpoint remains in several ways extremely confused and problematic.

First, the Kyoto School philosophers (with the notable exception of Nishitani) would never have been so careless as to employ such a racial metaphor as “post-whiteness.” Williams's rhetoric of this sort only serves to distort the politico-philosophical project of the Kyoto School. Second, by emphasizing the philosophers' internal conflict with the Tōjō regime, Williams fails to analyze how their discourse effectively supported that regime and helped mobilize Japanese citizens as part of the general war effort. Is this not ultimately a rather “orthodox” view of the school, one that ignores the role of imperial Japan as victimizer? Third, and above all, Williams does not criticize but indeed actually admires the Kyoto School's imperial nationalism. In spite of his supposed criticism of what he calls the “White Republic” (i.e., the United States), which because of radical demographic changes has become increasingly less white, his intent is clearly stated: “With the decay of the White Republic, the challenge of nurturing non-White agency, the post-White subject, what the Japanese call ‘*shutaisei*,’ that is individual and collective self-mastery, must be met if the society is to continue to work, and only if it works for the whole society will we outflank the final sorrows of empire.”²⁴³ Here we can see that Williams's aim is to help the American empire survive on the basis of the Kyoto School's logic of subjectivity. To this end, he affirms the necessity of mobilization. In fact, Williams professes a high regard for the German writer Ernst Jünger's essay on total

²⁴³ Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War*, xiii.

mobilization, which lies at the heart of fascist thought.²⁴⁴ One might thus be tempted to suspect that Williams's revisionism is actually a desperate attempt to rescue American imperialism by way of its former enemy. This would mean that the Kyoto School's theory of total war has now, sixty years after the fact, finally achieved its ideological triumph over the United States, thus realizing in dialectical fashion the ultimate identity of opposites.

In the following section, I examine the fundamental standpoint and essential features of the Kyoto School concept of total war.

Philosophizing the War: The Idea of Total War

The transcripts of "The World Historical Standpoint and Japan" symposia were first published individually in the journal *Chūōkōron*. The first session was held on November 26, 194, thirteen days before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Although this timing greatly enhanced the prestige of the discussions at the time, it is necessary to remember that Japan had already been at war with China for more than four years.

The discussions dealt with various topics from the theoretical and practical standpoint of the philosophy of world history, but they were most centrally informed by their critique of the constraints of western modernity and concerned with illustrating Japan's world historical position in forming a new world order. The second and third sessions took place the following year on March and November 24, respectively. After the excitement over Japan's early victories had abated and perception grew of the defeats suffered by the army in several subsequent major battles, the discussions became increasingly focused on the ongoing war. In fact, the last session, "The Philosophy of Total War," sought to provide a philosophical idea for the war. At the same time, this issue of war had constituted the basic problematic of

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 12.

the symposium from the very outset. In this regard, Kōsaka Masaaki's concluding statement at the first roundtable session was symbolic because it announced the key note of the following two sessions: "When man becomes indignant, his indignation is total. He is indignant in both mind and body. This is the case with war: both heaven and earth become indignant. In this way, the soul of humanity comes to be purified. This is why it is war that determines the crucial turning points in world history. Hence world history is purgatory."²⁴⁵ War as purgatory: the Kyoto School came to name this "total war" (*sōryokusen*), that is, a world historical conflict between competing worldviews that would ultimately overcome Western modernity and lead to the construction of a new world order.

As the title of the third session shows, the Kyoto School's discussions of Japan's world-historical position culminated in its discourse on war. In hindsight, one can see that this third and last roundtable session included all the points discussed in the previous two meetings. It sublated these points, as it were, because the current total war was the very process that would realize Japan's world-historical position. These thinkers were dealing with the war and its singularity not as a mere scholarly object but subjectively and in the very midst of it, because this war was unfolding before their eyes. In short, the importance of the *Chūōkōron* discussions lies in the fact that these philosophers were speaking about the war in an explicitly performative fashion.

As Kōsaka insisted at the beginning of the discussion, war has presented itself as a highly philosophical phenomenon. War is not simply one historical phenomenon among others, however, but possesses a unique ability to provide insight into the very essence of history itself. Kōsaka's remark does not concern war in general but is instead a specific reference to the "Greater East Asian War." It is specifically this war

²⁴⁵ Kōsaka et al., "Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon," 192. It should be mentioned that this view of history as purgatory derives from Nishida.

that must be understood as philosophical: “We now encounter a period in which worldviews themselves must radically change in a world historical manner. However, such change is mediated by war, or takes place alongside war. Thus war comes more broadly to include the meaning of a war of worldviews — a philosophical war, so to speak” (56).

Behind this conception is the recognition that modernity as a whole had come to an impasse. The emergence of the current world war was nothing other than a sign that the “modern order” of the capitalist West was collapsing. As Suzuki Shigetaka argued, as total war, the current war did not merely derive from such advances in military technology as airplanes and submarines. This war was instead a necessary consequence of the entire historical transformation of social structures, state regimes, worldviews, and technology. “In short, total war represents the overcoming of modernity,” as Suzuki declares (57). Other participants, such as Kōyama Iwao, agreed that total war was “a unique, historically unprecedented war” (57) whose goal is the overcoming of modernity. Kōyama also referred to the new mode of warfare as a “war of transformation” (*tenkansen*) (57). This war was thus both subjective and objective in that it was necessitated by historical and social changes while at the same time functioning to realize these changes itself.

The symposium participants all agreed that the war must be understood strictly as total war. In order to clarify the nature of the prevailing theories of war that they sought to overcome, the scholars contrasted their conception of war with two major theories put forth by Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) and Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937).

Clausewitz’s *On War* (*Vom Kriege*) was the first systematic reflection on modern warfare since the establishment of the nation-state and its attendant popular

army during the French revolution.²⁴⁶ Here Clausewitz first introduces the notion of the “pure concept of war” as “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,” that is, to overthrow, disarm, and render the enemy defenseless.²⁴⁷ In this regard, “There is no logical limit to the application of that force,” that is, war can go to any extreme necessary.²⁴⁸ However, this represents a mere theoretical notion of “absolute war.” Although the Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth century approached this concept for the first time in history with the employment of absolute war, war *in practice* is necessarily restricted by innumerable conditions imposed on the belligerent and thus has never been realized in its pure form. A crucial condition here is the political aims of war. In this regard, Clausewitz’s famous remark on such aims must be regarded as a dialectical synthesis of the pure concept of war and its real conditions: “We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”²⁴⁹

In the twentieth century, Erich Ludendorff, a former general who had led the Prussian military during World War I, declared that Clausewitz’s theory of war was now obsolete. Ludendorff proposed a new notion of war as total war in which all the physical and moral elements of the nation come to be mobilized.²⁵⁰ In marked contrast to Clausewitz, Ludendorff asserts that politics represents an extension of war rather than the reverse. By rejecting the argument that war represents an extension of politics, he specifically denied the notion of civilian control. Clearly, Ludendorff’s theory was based on the unprecedented scale of destruction in World War I, in which the

²⁴⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 78, 75.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁵⁰ Erich Ludendorff, *The Nation at War*, trans. A. S. Rappoport (London: Hutchinson, 1936).

traditional distinctions between home front and front line, civilian and soldier, etc. had been violently overthrown.

Translating the German term *totaler Krieg* as *zentaisen*, the Kyoto School philosophers tried to differentiate their concept of *sōryokusen* from these theories.²⁵¹ They argued that the current total war possessed an unprecedented nature that would drastically change the received ways of understanding war in general. They insisted that this total war exceeded the dimensions of all wars between nation-states since the French Revolution. In this regard they criticized Clausewitz, because the present war involved the much larger regions of East and West. They also rejected Ludendorff, whose conception was likewise limited to the nation-state and was created out of the context of imperialist war. In spite of the disagreements between Ludendorff and Clausewitz, both were judged to be ultimately similar in their conception of war as an exclusively military affair. In contrast, according to the Kyoto School thinkers, the present total war was such that the military did not need to integrate the otherwise distinct spheres of politics, economy, society, and culture because the very boundaries among these spheres were now fundamentally disappearing. As Kōyama writes, “[These] individual divisions each contain the other moments within themselves, and are unified in the monistic total war” (73). Kōyama calls such a condition “interpenetration” (*gogu gonyū* or *sōsoku sōnyū*). It is in this sense that he firmly rejects both Clausewitz and Ludendorff: “In the current total war, war is not an extension of politics by other means, nor is politics an extension of war by other

²⁵¹ These circumstances have encouraged some scholars to translate the notion of *sōryokusen* as “all-out war.” However, it is important to remember that this Japanese term, which literally means “war of general force,” was originally the translation of the German *totaler Krieg*. If the Kyoto School sought to intentionally alter the meaning of these terms, as several commentators have argued, it becomes all the more important to investigate the political context of this discourse. Let me also note as an aside that David Williams translates the notion of *sōryokusen* as “total resistance” (*Defending Japan's Pacific War*, 64-6). However, this translation seems impractical given that *sōryokusen* was also used at the time in reference to the enemy.

means. Instead, military, diplomatic, thought, and economic wars are expressions of a single total war throughout each of their particular spheres and functions” (73).

What Kōyama and others were seeking to accomplish with such statements was a presentation of a radically new system that could overcome the divisions of modern society. At the heart of this functionalist or holistic view of society lies a unique conception of dialectical logic that sublates all binary oppositions, unifying the one and the many, individuals and the whole through the notion of “absolute nothingness.” As Kōyama argues in his *Philosophy of World History*, absolute nothingness as ultimate universal transcends the world as objective totality. This notion also transcends time and is thus defined as eternity.²⁵² As absolute, however, it is neither other nor opposed to the relative and specific entities of the world; it is instead immanent in these things. Absolute nothingness as mediating force thus makes possible the interpenetration of opposites, allowing them to assume their proper place. Kōyama calls this logic “organizational universality” and describes it in terms of the Kegon Buddhist notion of “one-and-yet-all, all-and-yet-one” (*issoku issai, issai soku ichi*) (77). This concept, at once monistic and pluralistic, describes both the structure of total war and world history itself. In fact, Kōyama claims that the ultimate purpose of total war is the realization of a world order in which one “universal world history” and many “specific world histories” exist harmoniously and interpenetratingly.²⁵³

As a matter of fact, however, the primary concern of the roundtable discussion was the monistic nature of total war rather than its pluralistic ideal, because the participants wished to create a strong total war regime by mobilizing all human and natural resources. In this respect, the dialectical logic of total war not only allows for the mediation and mobilization of various spheres, it undergoes an expansion of both

²⁵² See Kōyama Iwao, *Sekaishi no tetsugaku* [The philosophy of world history] (1942; Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, 2001), 443-56.

²⁵³ See *ibid.*, 387-99, 443-56.

spatial and temporal dimensions. As Nishitani Keiji describes the vitalistic dynamism of the current war: “Nullifying the distinction between wartime and peacetime, the total war represents a force that has welled up from the profound ground [of history] to unify military power, the economy and culture. This force becomes aware of itself in the form of a power to wage war. As the energy for combat, such power essentially transcends ‘war’ in its narrower sense and continues into the so-called postwar” (62).

The disappearance of the distinction between wartime and peacetime has two important consequences. First, as Kōyama remarks, “The distinction between the frontline and home front is abolished” (72). Second, the war and postwar are now seen as continuous. Although these thinkers occasionally touched on the postwar, as if implying that the current war did have a definite end, they nevertheless stressed that there is no end to total war as such. Thus total war represents an indeterminate, endless war. Here the Kyoto School's dialectical conception of total war fundamentally transformed the received notion of war into a universal medium of world history. It unleashed the uncanny essence of total war, thereby rendering it permanent.

Aspects of Total War and the Antinomies

In this way, we can see that the aim of the third *Chūōkōron* discussion was dedicated to developing the totalistic nature of the total war. The notion of total here refers to a system that exceeds all distinctions, determinations, and boundaries (or what the Kyoto School thinkers critically referred to under the general rubric of modern rationality). In my reading, this third session contains several key themes or ideas that are not only closely interrelated but central to the two earlier discussions as well.

Before proceeding to these themes, let me first explain my critical standpoint. Despite the Kyoto School's dialectical attempt to go beyond modern binary logic, I believe that their idea of total war fails to avoid the problem of antinomy as examined

by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Kant, human reason that seeks to transcend all possible experience so as to determine the unconditioned totality or first cause produces two opposing propositions about the world as totality.²⁵⁴ The essential ground of the antinomies, which appear between such poles as finitude and infinity, necessity and freedom, lies in the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity.

As is well known, however, dialectical thought since Hegel criticized Kant's dualistic solution to antinomy that separates empirical and transcendental realms, thereby making totality a merely "regulative idea." In the early twentieth century, the Kyoto School philosophy of absolute nothingness, along with Hegelian Marxist Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), represents one of the major forms of dialectical philosophy of history that will overcome the split and contradictions in modern Western (bourgeois) thought.

Here it is crucial to show that in its generalization, the Kyoto School's idea of total war inevitably produced a series of unsolvable contradictions without truly mediating Japan's subjective position with objective world history. I argue that this attempt to overcome the fundamental problems of modernity falls into similar contradictions. What I mean by "antinomy" is precisely this paradoxical situation. In other words, the Kyoto School's antithetical argument regarding the contradictory thesis of Western modernity ultimately turns out to be self-contradictory. As "world war," total war can thus be described as the explosion of the dialectical or antinomic moment of the idea of "world."

²⁵⁴ Specifically, the antinomies concern such questions as whether the world has a beginning and end in time and space, whether everything in the world is determined by natural causality, and whether there is a free starting point of action. According to Kant, antinomies occur when pure reason applies the transcendental idea of the world to the empirical realm, using it as something objective and related to the "things in themselves." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 496-550 (B 490-595).

A. Transforming Capitalism through a New Subjectivity

First, the Kyoto School philosophers stress the importance of transforming the domestic social structure in order to prosecute the war, because total war is not exclusively a military issue but instead radically reorganizes every social sphere. Total war is literally “total” in that it abolishes the received divisions between home front and front line, wartime and peacetime. It mobilizes not only the army but also, more generally, politics, the economy, everyday life, and thought. Such total mobilization is regarded as essential to the task of overcoming the capitalist regime.²⁵⁵ As Suzuki observes, this task involves at the economic level the transition from a liberal economy to a “planned economy,” which represents the “process of overcoming class struggle” (62). Such recognition represents both an appropriation of the Marxist critique of capitalism and protection from that critique. This process, however, is a global trend in which the “national defense state” emerges as a centralized power that intervenes in class conflicts. Suzuki maintains that even such democratic states as England are likely to become increasingly totalitarian (87–88). We see here that the so-called welfare state originates from the warfare state.

Such socioeconomic change requires a transformation of the modern worldview in general. Kōyama insisted that the idea of *homo economicus* underlying modern economics must be transformed because it adheres to the low-level dimension of “desire,” thereby resulting in the social contradictions of exploitation and alienation

²⁵⁵ In their secret meetings, the Kyoto School philosophers discussed the issue of overcoming the liberal economy. According to Ōhashi, the second meeting focused on “how to make the capitalists understand the historical necessity of establishing the East Asian Sphere and theoretically convince them that the current situation is in no way temporary, that the war will not be concluded soon, thereby disallowing any return to the former liberal economy, and that now, therefore, new ideas are necessary” (*Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*, 184). Such a seemingly socialist critique was in no way unusual at the time, given the configuration of social discourse. On this point, see Yasushi Yamanouchi, “Total War and Social Integration: A Methodological Introduction,” in *Total War and ‘Modernization,’* ed. Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann, and Ryōichi Narita (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Program, 1998), 1-39; and Yonetani Masafumi, *Nihon/Ajia [Japan/Asia]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006).

(73). Henceforth economic behavior must above all be mediated by ethical considerations. What Kōyama and others proposed here is the creation of a new type of “ascetic” ethos based on “moral energy” (*moralische Energie*) that is both more productive and better able to serve one’s organization in a responsible manner. In connection with this, one must now abandon the bureaucratic organizational order that is solely concerned with maintaining equilibrium. As Nishitani states, “The fundamental problem of total war is not rationality in the sense of mere equilibrium or harmony within and between sectors; instead it is the irrational leap and its rationality, what can be called irrational rationality” (74). Thus the total order created by such new “elemental subjectivity” must, in its transcendence of modern “formal rationality,” be more organic and dynamic.

Yet here a strange paradox arises. In its criticism of the principles of capitalism, this project seeks to revitalize and mobilize what can be called a productivist ethos, a capitalism in which there would be neither ownership of private property nor class struggle.

B. Overcoming Imperialism and the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere

The discussion of the Kyoto School thinkers inevitably touches on the issue of the wartime enemy, that is, the imperialist order of the modern West. The current war, they believed, involved at its core Japan's world-historical destiny to transform the world order created by Western modernity and subsequently imposed on the rest of the world so as to establish a new world order. The West no longer represents the universal; instead it is Japan that will realize what Kōyama calls “universal world history.” The total war was not merely a regional war between nations but a global war between large geopolitical entities that transcended the borders of the nation-state. In other words, it was a “war between one order and another,” the newly emerging

East and rapidly decaying West. Accordingly, the aim of the current war, repeatedly referred to here as the greater East Asian war, was to liberate East Asia from the burden of Western imperialism, thereby building the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. Through this war, then, the regional order that is to be built functions at the same time as the subject that actually wages total war. The Kyoto School philosophers dwelled at length on their criticisms of the contradictions so abundantly apparent in the West, as caused by such Western principles as liberalism, popular self-determination, and sovereignty. Of these criticisms, Kōyama's remarks, which were made against the background of the proclamation of the Atlantic Charter signed by Roosevelt and Churchill, are perhaps the most powerful: "When popular self-determination (*minzoku jiketsushugi*) comes to the fore, its reverse side is inevitably the colonial empire. Such self-determination and imperialism represent the two sides of a shield that comes from the same source, as is unmistakably revealed by the historical facts of modern Europe" (82). As Kōyama concludes, "The same principle of liberalism brings about such incompatibilities as, on the one hand, popular self-determination and the colonial empire and, on the other, abstract ethics and authoritarian rule" (82).

Without question, this criticism carries a certain validity. According to the Kyoto School philosophers, virtually any idea produced by the modern West, such as liberalism, democracy, or humanism, is never free from such inherent contradictions. What these thinkers are pointing to here is the inscribed conflict between the notions of freedom and equality.

However, their alternative seems to be as dubious as the ideology they so rightly reject. Rather than presupposing a complete human being from the outset in the manner of individualism, these philosophers assert the necessity of "guiding" other dependent nations and "allowing each nation to take its proper place" (*tokoro wo*

eshimeru) according to its own developmental stage. This represents their unique interpretation of the infamous code word of Japanese imperialism, “eight worlds under one roof.” Yet it is easy to see that this interpretation involves restricting the sovereignty of other under-developed Asian nations, thereby subordinating them to Japanese colonial rule. As such, the difference between Western imperialism and the Kyoto School's own attitude toward these nations seems to disappear.²⁵⁶ Thus the attempt to overcome the contradictions of modern society, as caused by capitalism and imperialism, ends up repeating and reproducing the same problems, which I call antinomies.

C. Thought War Strategy and the Regime of Truth

At issue here are the strategy and tactics of the prosecution of the total war. The Kyoto School thinkers saw the task represented by the “thought war” or “war of ideas” as an extremely urgent one. Apparently the *Chūōkōron* discussions constituted a form of practice in this thought war, in addition to the thinkers’ secret meetings with the Navy. It is important to observe that the target of this thought war was not simply Japanese nationals. The practice sought to mobilize the masses both within and outside Japan in order to construct a new regime; it also worked to form a new kind of subjectivity, one whose “moral energy” would help enable this world-historical empire to come into being. In other words, these philosophers called for a new ethos and discipline that would inform the entirety of everyday life and influence both the outer behavior and inner lives of the peoples of the Greater Eastern Co-Prosperity Sphere. This is what the Kyoto School called “guidance” (*shidō*).

²⁵⁶ In their fifth secret meeting, these thinkers discussed the issue of plural sovereignty within the Co-prosperity Sphere. They proposed to “divide sovereignty” by placing Japanese leadership and the sovereignty of other nations in a hierarchical relationship. However, they failed to find an answer to the contradictions inherent in such a hierarchical order of sovereignties because these sovereignties are supposed to be absolute in and of themselves. See Ōhashi, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*, 205-13.

Nishitani Keiji notoriously insisted on the possibility of turning those Asian peoples with superior qualities into what he called “half-Japanese.” As possible candidates for this group, he mentioned the Malays, Filipino Moros, and Taiwanese aborigines. Nishitani proposed this notion of half-Japanization as the means not only to increase the Japanese population but also to awaken “national self-awareness and moral energy” among Asian peoples. He presupposed a strongly hierarchical relationship between authentic Japanese and half-Japanese. The other participants of the symposium actually warned him against such statements because they could easily be interpreted as racist.²⁵⁷ At the same time, however, Nishitani insisted in reference to the Korean people that the notion of the Japanese nation should become broader: “Military inscription has now been implemented in Korea and what has been called the ‘Korean people’ (*Chōsen minzoku*) have entered Japan in a completely subjective form. In other words, these people have become subjectively Japanese. As such, isn't it possible to say that the small idea of the ‘nation’ (*minzoku*) as a fixed entity has now fused into a larger notion? Can't the Yamato and Korean people be said to become one Japanese nation, as it were?”²⁵⁸ While Nishitani clearly endorsed the policy of Japanese-Korean unity (*naisen ittai*), he did not conceive of a mono-ethnic nationalism but rather a multiethnic one. Nevertheless, such an inclusive, imperial conception of nationalism by no means precludes racial discrimination. Here it is important to understand how closely the Kyoto School's universal — that is, world-historical — standpoint was bound up with their attempt to interpellate other Asian peoples as Japanese.

The members of the school were certain that they were fighting the war of truth, which should in and of itself possess the authority to convince the enemy as well

²⁵⁷ Kōsaka et al., “Tōa kyōeiken no rinrisei to rekishisei,” 161.

²⁵⁸ Kōsaka et al., “Sōryokusen no tetsugaku,” 78.

as other Asian nations of the purity of their own intentions, without the use of force. Here we may understand that the aim of the thought war was to convince the enemy and the Japanese people of the objective truth of Japan's subjective standpoint. "Japanese eternal truth" of "the national body" (99) possesses the force to subject other peoples to it, thereby constituting them as subjects. Thus truth makes people "subjective" in the dual sense of this term.

Yet the only reason that these philosophers referred to in explaining why Japan is in the privileged position to guide other nations was the fact that Japan was the sole Asian nation to have successfully modernized. It was this modernization that constituted the apparently objective truth of their standpoint. In this way, their thought war discourse reveals a certain complicity between truth and forms of hegemonic power.

Eternalizing War—The Temporal Dimensions of Total War

Thus far we have been concerned with the ideal aspects of total war and its antinomies. Now let us turn to the question of time within its process. Because the total war effectively negated the separation between wartime and peacetime, it possessed an extraordinary character in terms of its beginning and end. The nature of totality is not only related to the objective time line of total war but clearly involves in it the subjective (*shutaiteki*) dimension, or the relation between historical time and subjective time. Hence the war's "beginning" has a double sense: a certain starting point in historical time and the freedom to begin. By the same token, the "end" refers to both an endpoint and practical purpose. Here it is crucial to recognize that these distinctions are essentially related to three modes of temporality, that is, the present, the past, and the future. Significantly enough, it is in this context that the philosophers speak of one of their most fundamental notions, namely "eternity."

The question is whether or not the Kyoto School could mediate these dimensions of time through its philosophy of history and the narrative based on it. What is at stake here is the unity of time as well as the totality of the world.

A. The Beginnings of War

The *Chōūkōron* symposium participants repeatedly stressed that the war had neither beginning nor end in the usual senses. They insisted that one must abandon the commonplace understanding that, as Kōyama Iwao remarked, “‘war’ begins with a declaration of war and ends with negotiations for peace, thereby reestablishing in the postwar the original order of peace” (58). Thus total war seems to become a kind of undeclared war with no definite end.

First, let us examine the discussion of the war’s beginning in the objective time line and as subjective decision. Regarding the lack of any proper beginning of the war, the participants referred to the oil embargo imposed on Japan by the United States as well as the various economic sanctions imposed by the United States, Britain, China, and Holland. From this perspective, Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941 (Japanese Standard Time), was viewed as a necessary consequence of the economic war and moreover marked the beginning of the military phase of the war. This account, which still has currency today among Japanese conservatives, displaces Japan’s responsibility in initiating the war onto other countries. Yet the Kyoto School thinkers are more concerned with the reality of world history as it concerns Japan and seek to construct a narrative that mediates objective necessity with the free beginning.

According to this narrative, the greater East Asian war had actually begun long before this point. As Kōyama Iwao stated, “We must understand that the Greater East Asian War began together with the China Incident” (58 – 59). In fact, the “solution to the China question” had been one of the key focal points from the first roundtable

onward. All the participants agreed that its origin could be traced back not only to the 1937 China Incident, but further to Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931. It should be noted that in the course of the second roundtable discussion, Kōyama and others acknowledged that Japan's behavior toward China could easily be misunderstood as imperialist. Apparently these thinkers were somewhat uncomfortable with the “extremely opaque duality” of Japan's behavior vis-à-vis China.²⁵⁹ They were forced to admit the absence of any genuine cause of the incident. Instead “it was only after it had actually broken out that the significance and idea of the [China] Incident emerged. This is the way history works in general.”²⁶⁰ This remark is related to the recognition that “Japan has directly encountered the world since the Manchurian Incident. The pressures of the new world-historical reality preceded domestic reform.”²⁶¹ These statements suggest, first, that the symposium participants were fully aware that Japan's historical actions were already “thrown” into a certain historical situation and took place as a response to this facticity, or even as a deferred effect. Second, they acknowledged that Japan was from the beginning exposed to the external world in the form of its invasion of China and that this in turn affected Japan's internal affairs.

Yet how then does one explain Japan's “free” beginning of this war, for such freedom is required for its subjective standpoint in world history? In the first roundtable discussion, Kōyama suggested that Japan's surmounting of its economic sanctions would create a new world. “The true meaning of war is created by actually waging it. Whether we can make the past live or die depends on the present work.”²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Kōsaka et al., “Tōa kyōeiken no rinrisei to rekishisei,” 131. Nevertheless, Suzuki insisted that Japan's “special relation” with China was fundamentally different from imperialism because Japan aimed to protect it from partition and colonization by the West (132-34). In contrast to Japan's success as the only modernizer in Asia, China's antiquated consciousness of itself as the center of the world led it to wrongfully resist modernization, i.e., the “guidance” offered by Japan. In this respect, Kōyama criticized China because “it possesses a subjective consciousness as center but lacks the objective consciousness of the world” (129).

²⁶⁰ Kōsaka et al., “Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon,” 191.

²⁶¹ This remark is Kōyama's, in “Tōa kyōeiken no rinrisei to rekishisei,” 140.

²⁶² Kōsaka et al., “Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon,” 191.

Kōsaka's description of war as “purgatory” appeared precisely in this context. Obviously these statements were made in anticipation of the impending war with the United States, at which time Japan would make a truly subjective beginning. Here the subject of this decision is, as Kōsaka termed it, the “state-nation” (*kokkateki minzoku*). Thus, after Japan finally went to war with the United States, Kōyama declared, “The Idee of the Greater East Asian War justifies Sino-Japanese relations.”²⁶³ In fact, the name *Dai Tōa sensō* was a new designation for the entirety of the war — including the Sino-Japanese war since 1937, which began without any formal declaration of war. For Suzuki, December 8 revealed that necessity in history is nothing but subjective and practical necessity.²⁶⁴ Nishida Kitarō would describe such a moment of decision as a turn “from what is made to what makes” (*tsukurareta mono kara tsukuru mono he*). In this way, the Kyoto philosophers believed that the antinomy between necessity and freedom as two beginnings would be mediated and thus solved through the temporality of resolution.

However, it is highly dubious that the subjective beginning of decision making by the state can retrospectively purify the first beginning of war in which Japan was caught up. Obviously Japan's conflict with China was merely displaced as part of Japan's extended war efforts with the West. At the very least, the success or failure of Japan's subjective standpoint depended entirely on its ability to “convince” other nations. In any event, whether or not such narrative can bridge the gap between past and present is fundamentally open to the dimension of the future. Therefore let us now examine the ends of war.

²⁶³ Kōsaka et al., “Tōa kyōeiken no rinrisei to rekishisei,” 131.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 122.

B. The Ends of War

Just as the notion of total war reveals a fundamental ambiguity about the war's beginning, so too does its end possess certain characteristics that need to be analyzed. To be sure, the symposium participants were concerned with their strategic vision of how to conclude warfare in a specifically military sense. However, the ends they spoke of were far from univocal but referred to several different points of the future. It is important to ask what the philosophers were doing by talking about the future.

First, the war's current situation emerges as an issue in both its tactical and temporal dimensions. Here the philosophers reintroduce the distinction between military warfare as part of the entire war and total war at the meta level. Let us quote Kōyama: "The present war cannot be understood on the basis of the conventional concepts of war, for it possesses elements that transcend the limits of these concepts. Hence military warfare, which constitutes the most central feature of these conventional concepts, is not necessarily the decisive element now, as this has been replaced by the total war as such" (61). He continues: "The question of which aspects of total war come to the fore and which follow it depends partly on the war's objective conditions and partly on its strategy" (63). These quite realistic remarks could be read as implying future diplomatic negotiations with the Allied nations, that is, a possible cease-fire. While the dialectical argument here essentially contradicts the static distinction between the military and other aspects of total war, it also seems likely that the participants sought to shift focus away from its military aspects onto other seemingly less bellicose dimensions, thereby minimizing the weight of the military. Did they thus attempt to guide the war in a more rational direction, as for example both Ōhashi Ryōsuke and Ōshima Yasumasa suggest? In fact, one key to reading "The Philosophy of Total War" is to understand that the issue of the postwar is already explicitly raised there. A close reading of the dialectical argument on the temporality

of war will reveal that the participants were acting in a way that actually runs counter to their so-called secret intentions.²⁶⁵

Speaking of the postwar in the midst of war means that the symposium participants anticipated a point of time at which the war would end. This is the first “end of war” that the philosophers were concerned with. As we have seen, however, Nishitani stressed the continuity between the war and the postwar: “We must understand that the peacetime elements operating within the war will be extended to the so-called ‘postwar,’ where they will continue to develop” (60). In other words, the postwar means nothing but a continuation of total war.

Moreover, the participants emphasized the permanent nature of war. As Kōyama remarked:

The present war cannot be understood as ending in the form of a peace treaty, as in [previous] total and modern wars. Yet even if the war does end this way, it would be merely a temporary conclusion, as war would resume after a few years. What then are the circumstances under which the war will end? Both sides have certain limitations with regard to military warfare. It is absolutely certain that we won’t be defeated if the East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere is gradually established during the fighting, regardless of how long the war continues. (59)

Significantly, this statement refers to three different futures: (1) a temporary cease-fire which corresponds to what Nishitani called the postwar; (2) the inevitable resumption

²⁶⁵ We cannot take at face value the Kyoto School's hidden agenda, as testified to by Ōshima after the war, according to which the school early on anticipated Japan's defeat and subsequently engaged in a plan to prepare the nation for this eventuality. Indeed, the records of the secret meetings suggest that the opposite was the case. At the tenth meeting, held in November 1942, the philosophers avoided all discussion related to a possible cease-fire. On the contrary, they focused on expanding Japan's industrial and military production through eliminating such obstacles as bureaucratic formalism and fanatic spiritualism. Regarding the “global trends of the war,” they were fully aware of the difficulties faced by Nazi Germany in its war against the Soviet Union and offered the following remarks on the United States: “America must distribute its products not only to [its troops fighting against] Japan, but also to the Soviet Union and Britain. As such, the European question, i.e., whether Germany can stand and continue the war in Europe, will influence the war in Japan and its race of production against the U.S.” (Ōhashi, *Kyōto gakuha to Nihon kaigun*, 245-46). It thus seems undeniable that a cease-fire was never a real agenda at this point.

of military warfare and the ensuing long-term process of total war; and (3) ultimate “victory” as the true end of war. Hence the postwar belongs to the near future and is not considered the ultimate end. In addition, this second future is seen as a necessary process — despite, or rather precisely because of, the virtually ungrounded slighting of the military aspect. What must be emphasized here is that mention of the post-war is immediately canceled out by the temporality of the second future. It is impossible to defend this argument on the basis of the participants’ intentions.

C. Eternity at War

In this way, their conception of total war reveals itself as indefinite, almost permanent warfare. What is significant in this context is that the Kyoto School thinkers appealed to the notion of eternity — again, albeit in several different senses. We thus need to ask the questions: Is the end merely indefinitely delayed by this recourse to eternity? Or will the aporetic gap finally be unified among past, present, and future, between subjective time and objective history?

Essential to the idea of total war is that it attempts to transform the entirety of world history through the construction of the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. Just as Kant had to postulate “immortality” in order to secure the possibility of practical freedom, so too does the purpose of total war assume an ideal character.²⁶⁶ Thus “victory” as the ultimate future ceases to be an empirical and disjunctive possibility in the objective order of time and becomes instead the absolute vanishing point.

To this ultimate end, “endless progress” will be necessary. This is the meaning and function of the second future as the long-term process of total war. It is precisely

²⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 102.

in this context that the Kyoto School thinkers spoke of three different kinds of eternity or endlessness. Suzuki insisted on the necessity of eternal war: “It is impossible to conceive of a state in which war has ceased. Indeed, war is necessary, it is eternal. Particularly today, as we have just mentioned, an idea is required that will abolish the distinction between wartime and peacetime, thus so to speak eternalizing war” (64). This statement represents less a speculative than a radically positivist point of view. Suzuki stressed that a “final world war,” as advocated by Ishiwara Kanji, a military officer of the Kwantung Army, would be an impossible idea. Instead the cause of war lies in peace itself. History is nothing but the infinite alteration of war and peace (63–65). For Suzuki, however, eternity means a continual, indefinite, and therefore perpetual succession of time. To use Hegel's term, this is a “spurious infinity,” an endless, relative process in which one empirical endpoint is negated only for another to arise in the same way. It is important to recognize that negative infinity performs an essential dialectical function for total war: although it negates any empirical end in war, it provides a necessary, and perhaps the only, mediation for endless progress toward the ultimate goal. As a desperately endless process, however, this mediation points to an aporia within futures, an impassable path between the absolute end and the relative movement toward it.

Here emerges another kind of eternity, which Kōyama believed would be capable of mediating not only these two different kinds of endlessness but also the historical past and the future. This is the “eternal present,” which is one of the central concepts of Kyoto School philosophy. Kōyama remarks, “Beginning time while being in time, standing at the origin of time while being in the passage of time, that is to say, touching eternity — history begins from here” (98). In this conception, eternity is not time itself but rather the origin of time. Nonetheless, eternity can appear in time in the historical act of beginning. Kōyama thus rejects the ordinary notion of eternity that is

opposed to time and history: “There is no history for a merely eternal truth. The Platonic Idea has no history. Things like free, equal personality and ‘absolute spirit’ have no history” (97). Whereas these ideas are considered objective, Kōyama’s conception is fundamentally subjective.

Here let us refer to Kōyama's magnum opus, *The Philosophy of World History*, since it is in this 1942 text that he developed his argument of the eternal present in connection to world history. As he writes, the “relative facticity of the past” and the “absolute ideality of the future” are connected as opposites in the eternal present of resolute action.²⁶⁷ Therefore “the act of construction always touches absolute eternity and realizes eternal absoluteness in the instant of the present. Creative construction in the present is the absolute fact that touches absolute nothingness.”²⁶⁸ Based on this subjective temporality, Kōyama criticized the objective conception of time, which regards time as a mere linear succession from the past through the present to the future. This objective standpoint results in a dichotomy between causal and teleological views of history. For this reason, Kōyama rejected the notions of means and purpose. One must understand, he claimed, that each action contains its own “self-purposiveness.”²⁶⁹ In other words, history as the trace of such action is complete at each time without either development or progress.

However, this absolute view of historical time and action, which constitutes the principle for all world history, specific and universal, past and present, makes one suspect that such a philosophy of world history is trans-historical and formalistic.²⁷⁰ If this is the case, it is quite dubious if even this eternal present can provide an effective principle for historical transformation that mediates beginning and end, relative

²⁶⁷ Kōyama, *Sekaishi no tetsugaku*, 428, 430.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 430.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 452.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 453.

processes and the goal of objective history. Moreover, by regarding the resolute act of historical construction as self-purposive and complete in itself, Kōyama excludes not only the strategic dimension of war but also the very possibility of questioning the consequences and responsibility of such actions.

As a result, Kōyama's following argument in the roundtable discussion seems more or less inevitable: "The notion of eternal peace is wrong, but so too is the notion that war is to be glorified, for these two positions are the same, albeit opposites. In short, these positions represent a vulgar kind of thinking in which one chooses either war or peace in the context of their oppositionality. But this oppositionality disappears when we realize that war is essentially guidance.... A truly profound peace is not opposed to war. A truly great peace — 'Yamato,' the great peace. Here the opposition between war and peace will 'find its proper place' for the first time" (67).²⁷¹

Conclusion: The Dialectics of Total War

We can thus observe various dialectical contradictions in the Kyoto School's notion of total war: anticapitalism intensified exploitation and mobilization, anti-imperialism concealed domination and hierarchy, universal truth contained hegemonic power, war possessed an end but was endless, and war was peace and peace was war.

The Kyoto School's determination of total war was such as to absolutely sublate the opposition between war and peace. In this way, the philosophers negated the distinction between war and nonwar. In particular, it became impossible to meaningfully speak about the end of war, that is, either victory or defeat. The notion of war thus lost all definite meaning. As such, it would have been possible to interpret Japan's actual defeat in 1945 as an ultimate victory in some dialectical sense.

²⁷¹ As translated by Richard Calichman in Takeuchi, *What Is Modernity?* 133.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to neglect the practical or performative aspects of the *Chūōkōron* discussions. Indeed, a contradictory discourse often generates much stronger rhetorical effects than more reasonable language. It is thus crucial to determine the performative meaning of these practical antinomies vis-à-vis the wartime readership.

The central antinomy of the total war lay in destroying the signification of the term *war*. Once the border between war and nonwar was abolished, war was disclosed as indeterminate or even infinite. All-inclusive total war annihilated any oppositional logic and thus was absolute rather than relative. Thus it performatively produced a sense of the sublime, which was, in actual fact, realized through the operation of the wartime regime. War was to be expanded throughout all society in order to effect the mobilization of every social domain. Spatially, this mobilization was achieved not only in the domestic realm of the Japanese empire; its expansion was also sought throughout the greater areas of East and Southeast Asia, which were to be the *Lebensraum* (or “living area”) of the empire. The duality between the imperialist war and the anti-imperialist war must also be regarded as an antinomy. In this way, the contradictory totality at once destabilized and restabilized the boundaries of the empire. We must also call attention to the project of developing a productive subjectivity as one of the war’s decisive conditions. Specifically, imperial subjects came to be measured and defined by their resolution vis-à-vis the war efforts taking place in every social field. These subjects were to be disciplined through a sublime state of mind, as affected by the antinomic infinity of total war. The war was thus omnipresent, not only in military affairs but in all places and at all times. Temporally, this indeterminacy had the effect of making the war eternal; it mobilized people in an endless war that putatively aimed to liberate East Asia from the West. In particular, the colonized at the margins of the Japanese empire faced the most intense double bind in terms of their

ambiguous status as Japanese/non-Japanese. Although this status was properly seen as contradictory, it had the effect of forcing the colonized into making an impossible identification as Japanese. While destroying the confines of reasonable thought, the antinomic operations of the wartime regime gave way to both ethical and aesthetic exploitation and thus became the driving forces behind total mobilization and subjection.

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